

Celebrating the wildlife of Hertfordshire and Middlesex

# wildlifematters

Spring 2023



**Herts &  
Middlesex**  
Wildlife Trust

**What's  
Inside?**

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# Welcome



The support of our members continues to make the difference for wildlife. It has been wonderful to see the level of interest in the purchase of our new nature reserve, Archers Green, and I'm delighted to say that at the time of writing, we have already raised

over £317,000 in donations and grants towards our grand total campaign target of £500,000. You can read more about this and what happens next with the campaign on page 24.

Your collective voice continues to be vital in enabling us to stand up for wildlife. Nationally, there are still great concerns about the future protection of wildlife and wild places. The Government published its Environmental Improvement Plan at the end of January and collectively The Wildlife Trusts are pressing for the significant funding and government-wide policies needed to see nature's recovery and meet the target of 30% of land in recovery for nature by 2030. A great concern is whether or not the EU law, which has provided such critical protection for habitats and species, will be translated fully into UK law. Please do lend your voice and contact your MP - we've made it free and easy for you to send them a postcard through our #DefendNature campaign - visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/defend-nature-postcard-campaign](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/defend-nature-postcard-campaign) and act now!

After a long winter it's always wonderful to see the signs of spring, and with the first flowers appearing it's a good time to get out and look for wildlife. If you haven't already, please do sign up to receive our monthly e-newsletter at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk), which is full of opportunities to experience nature and wildlife in the area, plus nature-based events, news, what to look out for each month and ways you can get involved to help create a wilder future.

Thank you, as ever, for your support.

Lesley

Lesley Davies  
Chief Executive

**Cover:** Thank you to Keith Gypps for our cover photograph of a Hummingbird Hawk-moth, captured in Fowlmere near Royston in Hertfordshire. Keith won the General Wildlife category of our Wild Snaps Photography Competition in 2022 with this awesome shot.



Blackthorn blossom © Lizzie Wilberforce



Nursery Web Spider © Josh Kubale



Hares boxing © Russell Savory

## Get in touch

info@hmwt.org  
01727 858901  
hertswildlifetrust.org.uk  
Grebe House,  
St Michael's Street,  
St Albans, Herts AL3 4SN

Registered Charity No: 239863

Membership  
Lise Ashton  
membership@hmwt.org

Twitter  
@HMWTBadger

Instagram  
@hertswildlifetrust

Facebook  
@hertswildlifetrust

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Cover: Hummingbird Hawk-moth  
© Keith Gypps

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Join an event



Discover wildlife



Donate



Do



Take Action



Enjoy free of charge



Make your voice heard - #DefendNature



# Wild News



Broadwater Lake © Tim Hill

## HS2 Ltd Got Its Nature Figures Wrong

For more than a decade The Wildlife Trusts have highlighted the impacts on nature of the HS2 route, the scheme's design and the UK Government's approach to its delivery. Last month they released a new evidence report '*HS2 double jeopardy: how the UK's largest infrastructure project undervalued nature and overvalued its compensation measures*'.

We support the need for better and more sustainable public transport but nature, which is such a vital ally in the fight against the climate crisis, must not pay the price.

The route of HS2 cuts a swathe through Hertfordshire and Middlesex and, as you may be aware, has resulted in our Broadwater Lakes Nature Reserve being cut in two by the construction of a viaduct. The reserve has also been closed to visitors due to HS2 taking possession of the site. We fully support the call for HS2 Ltd to re-evaluate nature loss and provide fair compensation.

## New Course for Budding Botanists

We are excited to announce that 2023 will see the first intake of students for the Identiplant course which officially became part of the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland last year.

The course is aimed at those with an interest in developing serious botanical skills, such as correct, confident and accurate identification of plants and botanical terminology and is being run by its founder (and Trust volunteer), Brenda Harold.



Common Spotted Orchid © Josh Kubale



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more at [identiplant.bsbi.org](http://identiplant.bsbi.org)



Jack Snipe with Common Snipe © Barry Trevis

## Jack Snipe at Lemsford Springs

For the first time in six years, Jack Snipe has been recorded at Lemsford Springs – and not one but three! The small waders have been spotted on and off since last October and their presence has created quite a stir. Usually, a shy bird that is well camouflaged within its preferred habitat of dense wetland vegetation, the three were regularly seen in the open for long periods

of time over a sustained period in January. This rare and wonderful sight had birders and photographers flocking to the reserve.

This photo of a Jack Snipe with its larger cousin, the Common Snipe, was taken at Lemsford Springs by Warden, Barry Trevis and shows a good comparison between the species.



## Queen's Wood at Panshanger Park

This winter, a new woodland of 17,000 trees has been planted at Panshanger Park to create a 70-acre woodland as a lasting memorial to Queen Elizabeth II. Park owners Tarmac, in partnership with the Trust, Maydencroft and Hertfordshire County Council involved the

community in planting a mix of 19 native tree species. We have seen these gradually dotting the landscape in the woodland site thanks to hundreds of fantastic volunteers. Despite snow, ice, rain and mud, the trees have continued to be planted with dogged determination! Having the local community involved has been a fantastic way of ensuring it feels more of a woodland for everyone - community groups, local businesses, school and uniformed groups have all taken part, alongside some of the amazing HMWT supporters that we are so lucky to have. Thank you so much if you have taken part in planting the new woodland. If you didn't get chance then don't worry, you can always come and visit!

## Are you interested in ancient woodlands?

Herts Environmental Records Centre would like to hear from you if you are interested in supporting the update of *The Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)* project this spring and summer, which would involve collecting evidence of ancient woodland features, under guidance.

The records centre would also like to hear from woodland owners, who believe their woodland may be ancient (continuously wooded since at least 1600 AD), with a view to potentially arranging a survey, subject to availability.



Take Action

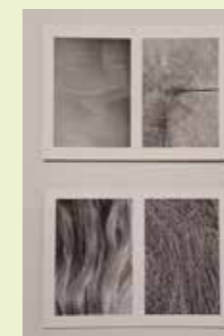
To start a conversation about either, please email [enquiries@hercinfo.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@hercinfo.org.uk)



Ancient woodland © Debbie Bigg

## Art students inspired by nature

Last spring, Dan Townsend, Senior Reserves Officer and Kathryn Dunnett, Reserves Officer met with tutors from Hertford Regional College at King's Meads Nature Reserve to discuss ideas for art projects. Then, in December, Kathryn and Lea Ellis, Wilder Communities Officer, went along to the college for a private view of the students' artwork, where they saw how King's Meads had provided creative inspiration, as well as some thought-provoking pieces centred around nature and the climate emergency. Thanks to all the staff and students for engaging with us.



## Thank you to our retiring volunteers

We would like to say a big thank you to three recently retiring Volunteer Wardens. Dr Nick Murray, Neale Holmes Smith and Barrie Stockwell (pictured left to right) each gave over 10 years of service to the Trust, protecting wildlife and habitats at Aldbury Nowers, Stanborough Reedmarsh and Willowmead respectively.

An afternoon tea was held at Tewinbury Farm Hotel as a thank you and we wish Nick, Neale and Barrie long, happy and healthy retirements.



© Ian Carle

## Hello and Goodbye, Staff News

Our work and projects continue to expand and we're delighted to welcome new members to the team to help us deliver our ambitious goals.

Alice Bradley joins us as Senior Philanthropy Officer, leading the development of our new Major Donor programme. Congratulations to Sarah Croft on the birth of her little boy in November and welcome to David Felber who joins us as Fundraising Officer, providing maternity cover. Carys Worsdale has joined the Fundraising Team as Administration Assistant, and Petra Green has moved to provide administrative support to the Engagement Team.

Gina Burlinson has joined the Trust as a People and Wildlife Officer on the Wilder St Albans project, which she is delivering in collaboration with Esme Staunton Howe.

Congratulations to Steven Werrell, who has a new role as Senior Project Officer within the Reserves Team. Bethany Palmer has been promoted to Reserves Officer and Jo Calcutt joins us as Nature Reserve Administration Assistant.

Emily Baker joins the team at Herts Environmental Records Centre (HERC) as a Data Officer and will primarily be working on *The Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)* project (see above).

With our team growing, so is the amount of central Business Support required. Jo Bayford joins us as HR Manager, Charlie Cooke has been promoted to Facilities Manager within the Business Support Team, and we are pleased to welcome Andy Taylor who joins Charlotte Caro in a shared Business Support Assistant role.

A sad farewell to our digital whizz, Natasha Aidinyantz. Kent Wildlife Trust gains as Natasha returned to her home county to take up the post of Digital Communications Manager there.



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Are you looking for a new challenge? Our team is expanding - explore jobs at the Trust [www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/jobs](http://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/jobs)



# UK NEWS



Bottlenose dolphins are a regular sight in UK seas

## From flukes to flu: our 2022 marine review

A year of exciting marine sightings included a species completely new to science. *Pseudumbellula scotiae* is a deep-sea coral that was discovered 240 miles off Scotland's west coast, at depths of up to 2,000m in the Rockall Trough. There were also several species spotted in UK waters for the first time, with Cornwall Wildlife Trust volunteers discovering the first official record of a sea slug named *Babakina anadoni*. Another sea slug found in Cornwall, *Corambe testudinaria*, was also new for the country, whilst Manx Wildlife Trust recorded the first ever Swordfish off the Isle of Man.

Whales and dolphins delighted people from Scotland to Scilly, with sightings of Pilot, Fin, Minke, and Humpback Whales showing how populations are recovering following bans on commercial whaling. Two new Orca calves were spotted off Shetland in January, whilst volunteers recorded over 80 sightings of Minke Whales off the Yorkshire coast in a single morning in August. Monitoring by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust also suggests that Bottlenose Dolphins are now present off Yorkshire year-round.

In more distressing news, seabird colonies around the UK were devastated by our worst ever outbreak of avian flu, caused by intensive poultry farming. Tens of thousands of

seabirds were killed by the disease, including terns, gulls, Gannets, and skuas. Research shows that as much as 13% of the UK population of great skuas — 8% of the global population — have died.

Unfortunately, avian flu was just one of the issues putting pressure on our sensitive sea life. There were multiple reports of people disturbing marine animals, from jet skiers ploughing through colonies of seabirds to beachgoers distressing seals by getting too close. Pollution continued to be a major problem, with several oil spills including 500 barrels leaked from a cracked pipe off North Wales. A study of dead Manx Shearwaters on Skomer island found the majority had eaten plastic, with adults feeding pieces to chicks. Scientists fear that 99% of seabirds may have plastics in their stomachs by 2050.

However, it wasn't all doom and gloom for our seas, as Wildlife Trusts embarked on many projects to restore coastal habitats. These wild places often have a vital role to play in sequestering and storing carbon, as well as sheltering wildlife. Several Wildlife Trusts started projects to plant seagrass meadows, which can absorb and store carbon up to 35 times faster than tropical rainforests. Essex Wildlife Trust created a toolkit for restoring

saltmarsh, another key habitat, to inspire and guide similar projects around the UK.

The UK will become the first nation to produce a complete map of its blue carbon stores. The Blue Carbon Mapping project — led by the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) in collaboration with The Wildlife Trusts, WWF and RSPB — has begun the task and will publish results this summer.

Wildlife Trusts also helped empower young people and local communities to save our seas. Projects ranged from art students cleaning beaches with Durham Wildlife Trust, to Cheshire Wildlife Trust training teachers to deliver lessons on wildlife in the Dee Estuary.

Discover more about these and other stories in our full 2022 marine review: [wildlifetrusts.org/marine-review-2022](https://wildlifetrusts.org/marine-review-2022)



The colourful *Babakina anadoni*

Breaching dolphin © John Macpherson; *Babakina anadoni* sea slug © Allen Murray

## UK UPDATE

### Have your voice heard in the Great Big Nature Survey

To help us understand how much nature matters to you, The Wildlife Trusts are launching The Great Big Nature Survey this spring. We want to hear your views on some of the most important issues affecting nature and wildlife, and your relationship with the natural world. How often do you get out into nature? Should people try to control nature to better protect it? How important are green spaces to you? What roles should people, business, and government have in looking after nature? Should local communities be at the centre of nature conservation on their doorstep?

Whatever your views on nature, however important (or not) it is to you, make your voice heard by taking The Great Big Nature survey today.

With respondents from a variety of backgrounds and with many different experiences in and views of nature and wild places, The Great Big Nature Survey will reveal what people in the UK and islands really think about nature and how we, as a society, should protect it. Results will also help The Wildlife Trusts to hold governments to account over environmental policies and priorities.

After you've completed the survey, why not share it with your friends and family?

Take the survey at [wildlifetrusts.org/great-big-nature-survey](https://wildlifetrusts.org/great-big-nature-survey) or scan the QR code



## UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



### 1 Hen party

The Northumberland Hen Harrier Protection Partnership, of which Northumberland Wildlife Trust is a member, announced a bumper breeding year for Hen Harriers in the county. Last year the partnership monitored nine nests, seven of which were successful — fledging a total of 26 chicks. This is eight more than in 2021 and brings the total since 2015 to 106 fledged birds. [wtru.st/26-harriers](https://wtru.st/26-harriers)

### 2 Give peat a chance

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust has been awarded a £100,000 Discovery Grant by Natural England to protect and restore the county's peatlands. Peatland is a vital habitat, not just for wildlife but also for storing carbon. The grant will allow the Wildlife Trust to identify mechanisms to restore the region's peatlands, so they can absorb and lock away carbon. [wtru.st/Derby-peat-grant](https://wtru.st/Derby-peat-grant)

### 3 Mr Blean

Kent Wildlife Trust has welcomed a male Bison into the herd at West Blean and Thornden Wood. The bull's arrival was delayed by post Brexit complications, but he has now joined the three females that were released in July, and the calf born in September. The Bison have 50 hectares to roam as part of the Wilder Blean Project, a joint wilding initiative. [wtru.st/bison-bull](https://wtru.st/bison-bull)



Ragged robin has declined due to habitat loss

### Plotted plants

The Wildlife Trusts are co-sponsoring production of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) Plant Atlas 2020, which is published this March. The Atlas is based on more than 30 million records collected by thousands of botanists between 2000 and 2019, providing an

unrivaled picture of the changing distribution and fortunes of plants in Britain and Ireland. This knowledge is likely to provide evidence to help us protect nature across the UK.

Find out more [bsbi.org/atlas-2020](https://bsbi.org/atlas-2020)

Ragged Robin © Kieron Huston; Bison © Evan Bowen





Blackthorn blossom © Lizzie Wilberforce

# The spring awakening

The dark days of winter are giving way to longer, lighter ones. Here we celebrate what's on the horizon as nature wakes up to spring and where to visit to see some of the most glorious spectacles of the season.

Whilst us humans may debate the start of spring – meteorologists mark its start from 1 March, whilst others will go by the vernal equinox, which this year sees spring start on 20 March - nature will have its own idea of when this season of new beginnings gets underway.

The climate has much to do with this. As temperatures begin to rise, so do nature's activity levels and the green shoots of spring really start to take hold.

At this time of year, we start to see an abundance of planted Daffodils,

trumpeting the start of spring. If you head to our Stockings Springs Wood Nature Reserve in Wheathampstead, you can enjoy the sight of our less common Wild Daffodils, with their pale-yellow petals uniquely surrounding a darker yellow trumpet. A carpet of white Wood Anemones'

flowers seek the light before the canopy of trees cast the woodland floor in shade. To witness these elegant blooms, head once again to Stockings Springs Wood or to Hobbyhorse Wood near Hertford or Old Park Wood in Harefield – but please do stick to the existing paths and keep dogs on leads to avoid damage to the ground flora. These are just three of the wonderful reserves that your membership helps us to protect.



Wood Anemone © Bruce Shortland



HAZEL DORMOUSE

From April, many woodland floors will turn into a haze of blue, awash with Bluebells. Have cameras and smartphones at the ready to capture the sight (and perhaps think ahead to our annual Wild Snaps Photography Competition)! Blossom also starts to brighten our world around this time – visit Tewin Orchard Nature Reserve for the most spectacular display of apple blossom and look out for Blackthorn's snow-white blooms

decorating our hedgerows. Did you know that the old phrase 'Blackthorn winter' heralds a sudden unseasonal spell of cold and wet or snowy weather at the same time as the tree is in blossom!

Birds keenly announce the start of spring as they look to attract mates and make territorial claims. Listen in and you will hear birdsong start to intensify in the mornings. Check out the Dawn Chorus Walks on the back cover page or simply open your senses to what's around you. The aptly-named Song Thrush sings a loud and beautiful song. Robins, unlike many other birds, will sing throughout most of the year but in the spring their song takes on a more powerful, confident and upbeat note. Blackbirds produce a mellow and harmonious song. Together, these common garden birds create a wonderful chorus and it's worth taking a moment to tune in to get your day off to a calm and focused start.

For many species spring is the end of a long period of reduced activity

but few actually truly hibernate – the Hedgehog, Hazel Dormouse and our native bats being the only mammals to do so. In March, Hedgehogs emerge from their slumber and, having lost a third of their bodyweight, they will be on the hunt for food, endeavouring to build themselves up as much as possible for the mating season in May. In April, native bats come out of hibernation, as does the Hazel Dormouse - fun fact, it actually snores during its winter sleep!

During March you may start to notice more frogs around as they leave their winter dwellings and make for breeding ponds. Insect-life picks up too – overwintering butterflies and bees reappear in search of sweet nectar.

What an uplifting time of year this is, full of freshness and new promise. Enjoy!

Discover wildlife



Blackbird © Bob Coyle

FIND OUT MORE

## Online

Find out more about the species mentioned in this article in our wildlife explorer [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer)

See how connecting with nature can improve wellbeing [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/health-and-wellbeing](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/health-and-wellbeing)

Share your photos of spring by tagging us @hertswildlifetrust on Instagram and Facebook and @HMWTBadger on Twitter





## Working with communities to restore our natural world and enhance wellbeing

*Nextdoor Nature* is bringing communities together to help nature flourish where they live and work. Thanks to £5 million funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, *Nextdoor Nature* provides people with the advice and support they need to help nature on their doorstep, and leave a lasting natural legacy to mark The Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

In Hertfordshire and Middlesex, our share of the Wildlife Trust's *Nextdoor Nature* funding, along with further funding from Herts Community Foundation and Dacorum Borough Council, has enabled us to kickstart our new 'Wilder Communities' programme and supported the recruitment of two Wilder Communities Officers. Esme Staunton Howe is working for a Wilder Watford, whilst Lea Ellis is promoting a Wilder Dacorum. In addition, People and Wildlife Officer, Gina Burlinson is working with Esme to deliver the ongoing Wilder St Albans project with funding from St Albans City and District Council. Here,



Heidi Carruthers Engagement Manager at the Trust tells us more.

Wilder Communities recognises that everyone has a vital role in helping to solve the climate

crisis and restore our natural world. No matter where we live, we can all be part of this crucial movement and make the most of access to nature.

Often, people want to do something on their patch but they don't know where to start and that's where we come in. Sometimes it's just a case of listening and giving someone the confidence to get started, other times

it's pointing them in the direction of useful advice or resources, and linking up like-minded people or groups to really set the ball rolling. This is all about involving the whole community and we are keen to hear from local individuals, groups and businesses, schools, colleges and other organisations, as well as under-represented groups.

Within Wilder Communities, we could, for example, see more people starting to grow their own vegetables and flowers, schools creating more

areas for wildlife within their grounds, businesses or groups turning highly urbanised or unused areas into natural spaces for wildlife and communities to enjoy. The added bonus is the positive impact this all has on our overall wellbeing and the potential to create a ripple effect of positivity which will filter into everyday life. What is exciting about this project is the uncertainty of not knowing what will come out of it but that anything is possible and that everyone has the power to make a positive change.



Community project © Penny Dixie



Talks have begun between Esme and Meriden Community Centre to hatch some wild plans for the area in association with our new project *Nextdoor Nature*. Exciting things to come for wildlife in Watford!



### Meet Esme Staunton Howe – Wilder Communities Officer for Watford

"I am excited about the focus my role has on trying to be more inclusive when it comes to conservation – it may have seemed a bit exclusive in the past but there is a real shift in people feeling like they can do something themselves and that's great. Listening to how people want to get involved with nature on their patch is particularly important to me as I grew up in Watford – I just want to see the town, people and wildlife thrive here.

A fundamental part of my role is to encourage more young people to get involved in taking action for wildlife and the environment. Already, there are some amazing young people standing up for the environment and there's a great opportunity for more young adults to get on board too.

Whether by individual acts, or by collaborations, my aim is to get everyone believing that they can do something and whatever that is, it is good enough!"



© Paul Harris



© Paul Harris



**Do you have an idea for your community?**

If you are interested in finding out more or want help or advice on individual, group or business wild projects, please email [wildersupport@hmwt.org](mailto:wildersupport@hmwt.org)





**Meet Lea Ellis – Wilder Communities Officer for Dacorum**

"I aspire to get to a place where it is accepted that we are all invested in nature and that it's natural to notice what is going on around us, so it becomes part of our everyday lives. I want to try and change perspectives, to instil an attitude of 'anything is possible' and that we all have the power to change things.

Since the pandemic, we are all more aware of how important it is to have an outdoor environment that we can all easily get to - a park, a wood, a front garden or balcony. A bit of fresh air, listening to the wind in the trees, or watching sparrows chattering in a hedge connects us with nature and improves how we feel.

My role isn't one where I turn up with cash or organise things, it's about support and empowerment. It's about you, you can do this and make it a part of your daily life. It has to come from you, in the community, where you live."



**Meet Gina Burlinson  
People & Wildlife Officer  
(Wilder St Albans)**

"I'm working with organisations and groups across St Albans to discuss priorities for nature recovery in the area, advising on projects and facilitating them. It's exciting to think about what will come out of these meetings and the positive impact that will have on nature and the community.

I would like to see people creating a stepping stone for nature and making corridors for wildlife by planting a tree or shrubs in the garden, creating a hedgerow as a boundary, or making a pond.

Personally, I had no idea I liked nature until I felt a connection with it and then I was hooked. I want to inspire others to experience and enjoy it."



Young Volunteers tackle Batchwood's Brambles

As part of their Duke of Edinburgh award, eight volunteers from three different schools in St Albans are volunteering once a month with the Friends of Batchwood to manage the Batchwood woodland.

This month they were clearing sections of scrubland, using loppers, silky saws and rakes to open up the wood, allowing new plant species to emerge and thrive and increasing biodiversity in Batchwood!



© Matt Hatton

There's so much life bursting forth right now! We're looking ahead to continue working with local communities and engaging with nature, right on our doorstep. The days grow longer, so take the time to breathe, in your immediate surroundings whether urban or rural. Just five minutes can make a difference.

# Wilder Community Heroes

Esme's been inspired by a variety of people and projects, taking action in Watford, including, a community group pitching to make their churchyard wilder; **Random Café**, a not for profit project with an allotment, café and shop on Watford's Meridan Estate, which is making great strides at tackling food waste and achieving a fairer,

more sustainable food system; the **Urban Orchards** project by Watford & West Herts Chamber of Commerce, which has seen 10 orchards planted across Watford; and **Refillabell**, a zero waste refill store, seeking to reduce the use of 'single use plastics'.

Across the Dacorum District, Lea is meeting inspiring people and listening to their stories, from

neighbours planting vegetables and sharing their surplus, to a lady who took it into her own hands to prune back brambles for the sake of the local community, to the **Community Fridge** in Highfield, which provides a place to get free surplus food or to donate food that would otherwise go to waste.

## What Can We All Do to Support the Natural World



### One Quick Win for Wildlife

Whilst Lea, Esme and Gina are busy working with communities, here's something we can all do to support the natural world...

Spring Cleaning? Please watch what you wash away... Many cosmetics, soaps, washing up liquids, and cleaning products contain toxic chemicals and plastics that are not only harmful to us, but are harmful to the environment. We wash many of these chemicals down our drains when we wash up or clean, flushing them into our rivers and seas. Drain misconnections also threaten the health of our rivers where waste water from our homes is released directly into rivers and streams - you can find out more about that here: [therivertrust.org/about-us/news/drain-misconnections](https://therivertrust.org/about-us/news/drain-misconnections). Please don't put anything non-biodegradable down the sink or toilet. There are many eco-friendly brands on the market and if you search the supermarket shelves, you'll see that many have their own-brands too, made from natural and environmentally friendly ingredients. These alternatives are usually made in a more sustainable way and often use more sustainable packaging. What's more, the environmentally friendly option is usually better for you! They're less harsh on skin and conventional cleaning products contribute to bad air quality in your home. There are lots of alternative products out there so this month why not switch something that you use, to a more environmentally friendly alternative.

### Wildlife Wave

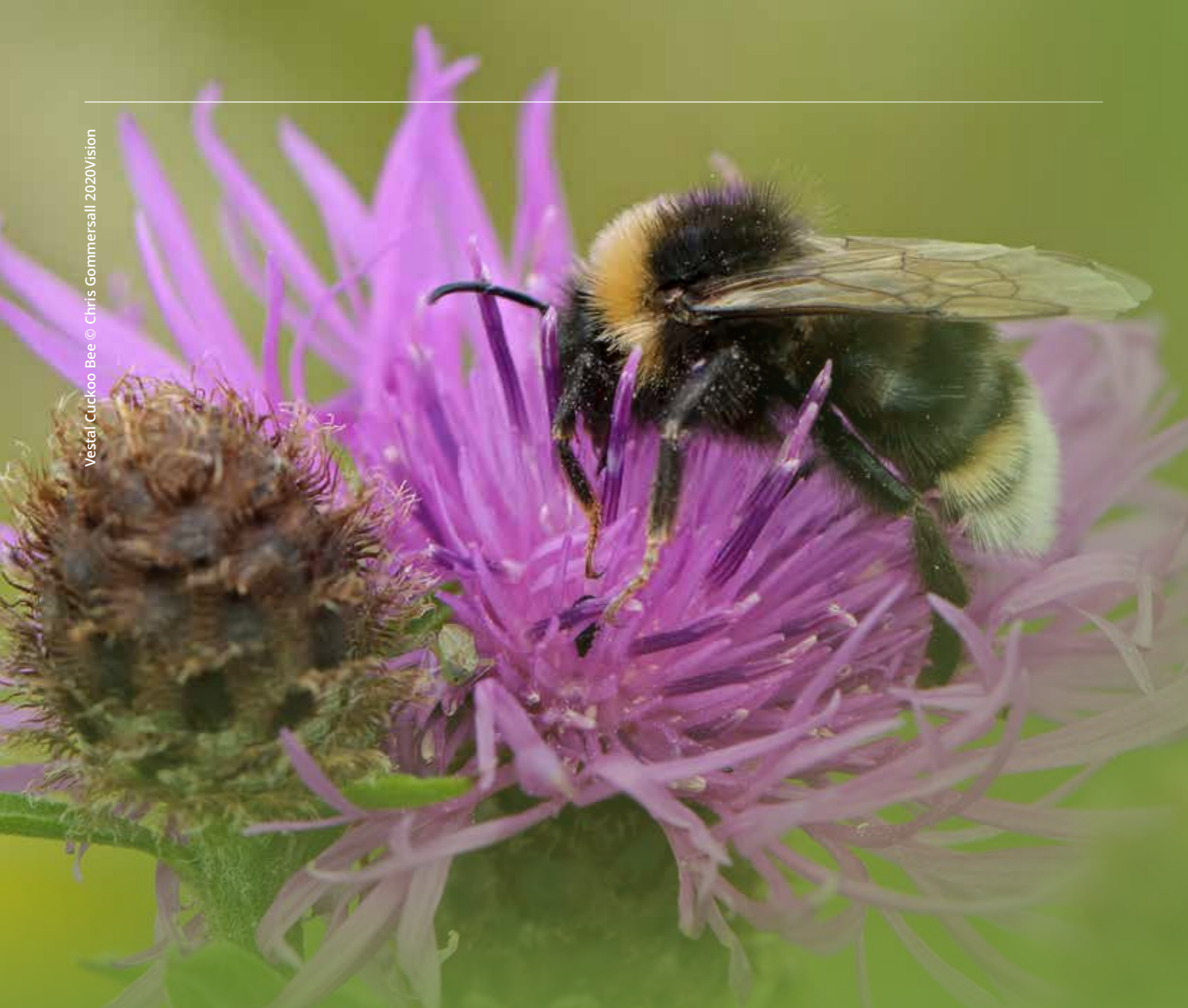
All of us have a part to play in spreading the word about the nature crisis. Why do we need more people talking about wildlife? Because we need more people on nature's side. Rather than telling people what to do, we want to give people the confidence and knowledge to take small steps in the places they will have the most impact, so each person's actions will look very different. But there really is something that we can all do and every action really does make a difference. We would love to challenge our members to have a conversation with just one other person about our wonderful local wildlife and what we can all do to help. We have more than 22,000 members and if you were all able to have just one conversation with one other person, that could be over 22,000 new people getting ready to take their action for wildlife! Let's try to create a wave of conversations. Talking to others can be good for us too. We learn new things and connect with people. Begin with something you have in common, connect the dots with how you both may be affected, and finish on an inspiring note! You might invite a friend to visit a nature reserve when the Bluebells are out, or ask a neighbour if they'd like to make a Hedgehog highway between your plots.



### Do you have an idea for your community?

If you are interested in finding out more or want help or advice on individual, group or business wild projects, please email [wildersupport@hmwt.org](mailto:wildersupport@hmwt.org)





# Weird and Wonderful Wildlife: The magic of feminine wiles in nature

Every March, International Women’s Day globally celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. That set us to thinking about some of the wonderful happenings with a female focus in nature. In the pursuit to survive, populate, eat and not be eaten, our wildlife has evolved fascinating strategies. Read on to discover more.

## Vestal Cuckoo Bee

The Vestal Cuckoo Bee isn't all that it seems. It is the Buff-tailed Bumblebee's doppelgänger and it has evolved similar features so that females can sneak into the nests of their close cousins and lay their own eggs. Once inside, the Vestal Cuckoo Bee takes on the nest scent so she isn't attacked as an intruder. Then, she dominates or kills the host queen before laying her own eggs, which the Buff-tailed Bumblebee colony cares for as if they were their own.



## Hazel

The Hazel is monoecious, meaning that it has separate male and female parts on the same tree. Whilst the male catkins make quite a show, the much smaller and more discreet female flower bud has several flowers with protruding crimson stigmas. The female bud sits above the male flower so as not to self-pollinate but to instead catch wind-blown pollen. Once fertilised the female flower develops into an oval fruit, which hang in groups of one to four and mature into a nut with a woody shell, known as a cob.



## Bee Orchid

This delightful flower is a true wonder of nature. The bulbous velvety lip at the bottom of the flower loosely resembles a female bee, complete with stripes and even a thin coating of fur. A most deceiving plant, Bee Orchids also emit a female bee scent to lure male Long-horned Bees with mating on their mind. As they land on the lip, pollen is transferred, thus pollinating the plant but leaving the poor male bee frustrated. There were two species of Long-horned Bees in the UK (*Eucera longicornis* and *Eucera nigrescens*), the former is mainly found in localised populations in Southern England and Southern Wales but, sadly, the other is now thought to be extinct here. Bee Orchids are still found without the bees and are able to self-pollinate – look out for them at our Hexton Chalk Pit Nature Reserve, in the village of Hexton, to the west of Hitchin.



## Water Vole

Water Voles breed rapidly and typically produce three or four litters a year with up to five pups at a time. The average lifespan of a Water Vole being six to 18 months, it is possible that a female might deliver 30 pups in her lifetime!



## Nursery Web Spider

The Nursery Web Spider is commonly found in grassland scrub and can often be found sunbathing among Brambles and Stinging Nettles. The female will carry her round egg-sac in her fangs and when her young are about to hatch, she'll build a silk sheet amongst the vegetation to act as a tent, sheltering them until they are old enough to make their own way into the world.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

You can seek out more fantastic female facts by studying the wildlife explorer pages of our website [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer)





# Being part of a work party

## New skills and great camaraderie – why not give a work party a go?

Last October, the Trust organised a staff volunteer activity, a ‘work party’ – not the kind with a three-course meal and disco but one where we all got an opportunity to experience what it is like to work on one of our nature reserves - Patmore Heath, close to the village of Little Hadham, just outside Bishops Stortford. We thought we would share our experience with you so you can see for yourself if you would like to give a work party a go...

Reserves Officer, Kathryn Dunnett and Senior Project Officer, Steven Werrell welcomed us all and introduced us to Patmore Heath, a wonderful habitat of acid grass heathland, which is now scarcely found in south east England. The heath is populated by a variety of grasses and, in summer, flowering plants such as Heath Bedstraw, Sheep’s Sorrel and Harebell can be found there. In damper areas, locally rare Heath Rush and Southern Marsh Orchid flourish. The ponds on the heath support all three of our native newt species – Smooth Newt, Palmate Newt and Great Crested Newt. Grass

Snakes and Common Lizards are also resident, whilst in the skies above Kestrels and Red Kites soar.

Kathryn explained that pre-Second World War an aerial photo would have shown the heath without trees. That’s not the case today. One of the major tasks that volunteers undertake at Patmore Heath is clearing tree saplings and brambles to keep it open, which is vital to support diversity. The heath is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Natural England have currently assessed its condition as unfavourable (recovering condition), which means that if current management measures are maintained the site will recover over time – the hope for Patmore Heath is that it will be deemed favourable i.e. its habitats and features will be in a healthy state and being conserved by appropriate management within a couple of years.

So, our work party’s aim was to take us a step closer to that, to work together towards clearing the heath of sapling trees and encroaching

scrub and brambles – all targeted at maintaining a diverse heathland habitat. In addition, we were tasked with coppicing the Willows around the pond to make sure the light reaches the water’s edge to maximise productivity.

On the day, many of us were introduced to new tools – tree poppers, loppers, mattocks, silky saws and brush cutters. Steven and Kathryn briefed us on handling the equipment and gave us clear safety instructions before we divided ourselves up into task teams.

Armed with tools and keen to try out new skills, there were whoops of joy and smiles of satisfaction as tree roots were popped, brambles were raked and branches were sawn. Collectively, we were impressed by how much we managed to achieve and when we sat together for tea breaks and lunch the buzz of camaraderie grew.

It felt great to be part of a work party and we all got different things out of it.

## The Feel Good Factor



“

It’s great to get everyone out so that we can show in practice how we look after sites like Patmore Heath and also share the experience of why the reserve is special.

**Bethany Palmer,**  
Reserves Officer



“

It was lovely to have been brought together after the last couple of years of separation. I particularly enjoyed coppicing and working with tools, plus the serenity of sitting outside on a lovely day.

**Lea Ellis,**  
Wilder Communities Officer



“

I found tree popping therapeutic – the sound was so satisfying and so was achieving so much in a small movement. I really enjoyed it.

**Charlotte Caro,**  
Business Support Administrator



Trust work party lunch at Patmore Heath © Debbie Bigg



### Our wonderful volunteers

Kathryn, who looks after 15 of the Trust’s reserves to the east of Hertfordshire said “We couldn’t carry

out the amount of work needed without the help of our volunteers and work parties – we simply don’t have the resources ourselves to accomplish all the work that is needed or the money to hire contractors. We are hugely grateful to all our volunteers. Without them, our reserves would quickly become overgrown and in bad condition – it would be a disaster!

Work parties across our reserves vary – some sites require less attention and others a lot more. Our volunteers enjoy working across different habitats and sites without having to travel too far.

Our approach at work parties is pretty flexible, we give people time to build

up their strength and gain fitness if that’s something they need to do and start with less taxing jobs. Breaks can also be taken as needed. Many of our volunteers enjoy keeping active, doing a physical job and playing their part, as well as the social aspect.

I find our volunteers great people to be around and work parties are some of my favourite days at work. I’m really proud of what we achieve.”

In our last financial year (2021/22), volunteers supported us with more than 8,500 hours of work – much of this taking place on our nature reserves. On the next page, we hear from two of them.





“

I've always been interested in wildlife, both flora and fauna, and decided to try volunteering locally when I retired last year. While the work parties have been hard work at times, the people I've met and the reserves I've been able to 'get down and dirty with', have been great experiences. I totally recommend giving it a go, you learn so much from everyone involved, and there is lovely camaraderie and banter - it hardly seems like work at all!

**Mary Young**

“

Work party volunteering can be a physical workout. Some tasks are strenuous jobs in conditions ranging from winter snow to hot summer sun. What's the attraction? Working alongside like-minded people managing reserves and creating conditions to help nature thrive. And, hopefully, getting fitter without paying gym fees.

**Gary Tedds**

We couldn't achieve what we do without the support of our volunteers, many of whom are also valued members of the Trust. From fixing fences, to clearing scrub to carrying out surveys, our work parties make an incredible contribution to our local habitats and wildlife. And our volunteers tell us that they benefit too - learning new skills, meeting new people, working in the open air, making a difference, improving fitness, and overall the positive impact it has on their wellbeing.

Mary (right) and Gary (left) tree popping at Patmore Heath



Take Action

If you would like to join us in carrying out more vital work on our reserves, sign up to volunteer at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteering](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteering)



## Could you become a Trustee?

We are looking for people with a passion for wildlife, who have entrepreneurial flair and the ability to think strategically to help us pursue our vision for a Wilder Hertfordshire and Middlesex. The Trust seeks to be a welcoming and open organisation and is committed to the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

We are particularly interested to hear from people with skills in one or more of the following areas - ecology, land management, charity law and compliance, finance, business development, behaviour change and communications.

You will bring your expertise and experience to help us achieve our strategic aims and, as a member of the Board, will oversee our governance, risk management and financial sustainability. You will have the opportunity to support our advocacy work with partners and

fundors and help us stand up for wildlife.

You will need to attend quarterly Council meetings, the AGM and Committee meetings. Trustees can be appointed for up to three consecutive three-year terms.

This is a voluntary role but reasonable expenses will be reimbursed. If you'd like to help make a difference for wildlife in Herts and Middlesex as one of our Trustees, please contact Becky at [becky.vernon-clinch@hmwt.org](mailto:becky.vernon-clinch@hmwt.org) for an information pack.

**Closing date: Friday 28 April 2023.**

**Interviews will be held in early May.**



### Our next Annual General Meeting (AGM)

We will be hosting our next AGM on 30<sup>th</sup> September. Further details will be available in due course.





# Not just another 'ology'

Ian Carle is Nature Reserves Manager at the Trust. Ian has a resounding interest in the collection of data to support nature conservation and this has led him to explore the Victorian study of Phenology.

Phenology is the study of events in the life cycles of plants and animals and how they are influenced by variations in climate. It used to be all the rage in Victorian times with the Royal Meteorological Society launching a national scheme to record phenological events in 1875, which ran until 1948. Locally, recording was promoted through organisations such as the Herts Natural History Society who had recorders responsible for contributing to the study.

Ok, so it's 2023 and we are in the middle of a biodiversity and climate

crisis, why am I banging on about what wealthy Victorians got up to in their spare time? Well, thanks to the work of those dedicated recorders we have a reliable scientific record of when events, such as first flowering, took place. For example, in 1879 Hazel first flowered in Hertfordshire in the middle of February, Dogs Mercury in the last week of February and Ox-eye Daisy at the beginning of June. Skip forward to the present day (- as I write this article at the end of January) both Hazel and Dog's Mercury have been flowering for weeks and I'm looking



forward to seeing my first Oxeye Daisy flower towards the end of April.

Many of the management practices that we use on our nature reserves today are based on traditional ones. We carry out that management, such as our hay cut at Frogmore Meadows and our coppicing at Old Park Wood, at almost exactly the same time as when our Victorian naturalists were making their observations. What we have lost, partly due to the prescriptive nature of current agri-environment schemes, is the ability to adapt our management to the season – to use current phenology to help us decide when the time is right to make that hay cut, for example.

Studies of farming practices in Europe indicate that the timing of traditional hay cutting was based on the flowering stages of certain plants – “when the red clover fades it is time to mow”. These phenological facts were passed from generation to generation and where they are still used today

the grasslands are more botanically species-rich than those that are managed using fixed cutting dates.

Even where botanical species richness is not our primary concern it makes sense to examine our management in the light of phenological phenomena. For example, are our Chalkhill Blues at Hexton Chalk Pit on the wing earlier? If so, should we be putting sheep on site earlier? When planning for annual programmes of tree safety works at our nature reserves, we are finding that the extended bird nesting seasons leave us with a shorter window to carry out this vital work.

Thanks to the great contributions of the recording community in our area we have a fair amount of evidence to show changes are taking place, but we could always do with more. So, if you are an experienced recorder and already submit records to our county recorders, bird club or records centre, consider adding some extra information to your records.

For example, was the bird you saw carrying nesting material or food in its beak; was the butterfly or dragonfly you spotted egg laying, or the plant you observed flowering?

Phenology is part of our recording history but it's worth considering how this study of old could shape the future...



FIND OUT MORE

## Online

The Herts Natural History Society website has an archive of publications, where you can find out more about Phenology in Victorian Times, such as this extract from 'Phenological Phenomena in 1889 and 1890': [hnhs.org/archivedisplay?page=H-6-4-26](https://www.hnhs.org/archivedisplay?page=H-6-4-26)





# Wild Walks – Explore the sights, sounds and smells of Old Park Wood



Anna Daniels is a Reserves Officer at the Trust and looks after the Trust's nature reserves in the west of our patch, as well as leading on the Cassiobury Park

and Whippendell Wood project in partnership with Watford Borough Council. Anna enjoys the diverse range of habitats she works to protect and is particularly interested in birds, trees and fungi.

One of the reserves under Anna's care, is Old Park Wood, an ancient woodland, which sits on the Hertfordshire and Middlesex border, a stone's throw from Harefield Hospital. It was listed in the Domesday Book as a breeding and hunting ground. A century ago, it was used by patients from the hospital to exercise as they recovered from Tuberculosis. The reserve is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and supports Coralroot Bittercress, a rarity in both the UK and Hertfordshire, which grows in the damper areas of the site. It is thought that Old Park Wood has been continuously wooded since Saxon times and is dominated by Oak, Hazel, Silver Birch, Holly, Cherry, Hornbeam, Sweet

Chestnut, Alder and Ash. In spring, the woodland floor is adorned by a spectacular carpet of Bluebells and birdsong fills the air. Anna takes us on a stroll to find out more about this special place.

If you are arriving by car, park by the pond on Hill End Road. If travelling by public transport, you can catch the R1, R2 or U9 bus to Harefield Hospital, which is 0.5 miles away or the nearest train station is Northwood, 3.5 miles away. From Hill End Road, stroll down the road until you see allotments on your right and take the public footpath which runs alongside them until you see the entrance and sign for Old Park Wood. Previous visitors may be familiar with a circular route – **please note** that this is not currently accessible due to path closures for public safety during remedial work to trees affected by Ash dieback. From the sign you currently have a choice of two walks.

## Walk one

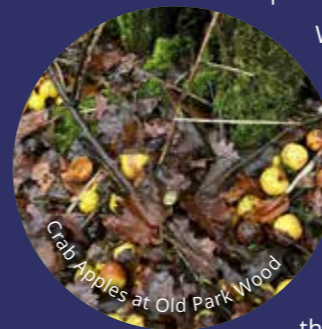
(around 2 miles starting and finishing at Hill End Road)

As you enter the site, please be sure to keep to the perimeter path – this will protect the growth of Bluebells and leave breeding birds undisturbed. Immediately you will see signs of our tree safety work – as much wood as possible has been retained as habitat - Ash have been cut back to monoliths to remain as dead-standing wood, branches have been compiled into brush piles and log piles have been created – all resulting in fantastic deadwood habitats for a great range of invertebrates, fungi and other wildlife.

The path curves right into the wood and you'll be met by the sight of tall Holly – during winter its berries will provide a valuable food source for birds, such as Redwings and thrushes.

Note how the Hazel has been coppiced to allow more light to reach the woodland floor. It's a species that takes well to coppicing which encourages growth. Plants such as Bluebells and Wood Anemones will benefit from the extra light, whilst deer baskets ensure the vulnerable Hazel regrowth doesn't get nibbled!

A bench provides a good place to sit and enjoy the view, take in the song of the Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit and Long-tailed Tit, listen to Jackdaws chattering or the drum of a Great Spotted Woodpecker.



Crab Apples at Old Park Wood

Walk on and notice delicate Hazel catkins, the fall of Crab Apples and look up to see Honeysuckle growing high in the trees. A tiny log bench provides a novel resting point for young walkers and an interpretation board provides more information about the site.

Carry on along the path until you reach a lookout over the pond to your left. Take time to enjoy the sights and sounds of this haven for damselflies and dragonflies, before heading back along the perimeter path towards the entrance point.



Coralroot Bittercress and Bluebells at Old Park Wood

## Walk two

(around 1.5 miles starting and finishing at Hill End Road)

At the entrance to the site, don't turn into the wood but carry straight on along the footpath. This is the way to go if you want to see Coralroot Bittercress in the spring – a rare plant with delicate pale purple flowers.

The route for this walk is corralled by open fencing on either side – it provides a great opportunity to look down over the woodland as the path descends to the lowest part of the wood.

At the wooden bridge, look left to the collection of tall Alder trees, a sign of wet woodland. As you head further down the path, note the unique earthy, woody, mushroomy smells. Look out for the tree stump of the large felled Ash on your left, marvel at the colour and pattern formation in the woodgrain and, if you have patience, try counting the number of rings.

When you reach the sign at the bottom of the hill, take a moment to admire the velvety, bright green lichen before turning around. Now, the climb back up the hill begins – just see how the view changes in ascent.

We hope you can find the time to visit and explore the sight of Old Park Wood. Your membership helps us to protect these ancient woodlands and the wildlife that has thrived within them for centuries. Thank you for safeguarding their future.



Felled Ash at Old Park Wood



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

Explore other ancient woodland sites at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves)

Find out how you can be part of a nationwide ancient woodland survey on page 5.



Enjoy free of charge



# Wild Community

Find out how people have been champions for wildlife in Hertfordshire and Middlesex



## Archers Green update

The first phase of our £500,000 fundraising appeal to buy and protect Archers Green – a priority area for conservation near Welwyn Garden City – has been a huge success. Since the launch of the campaign in September, we have submitted grant applications, participated in the Big Give's Christmas Challenge and seen a wonderful response to our public appeal, raising £270,000 by the end of January. At the time of writing this figure has grown to over £317,000. However, despite this excellent start, the future of this globally rare habitat and its wonderful wildlife is still at risk if we don't continue to raise the funds needed to reach our target.

Phase two of this campaign is just as critical as the first phase and we have been working with local partners to deliver a programme of community focussed activities to highlight the importance of this wonderful local wildlife haven. We also continue to submit further applications to grant-making bodies and will be looking at possible legacy fund allocations to help us reach the £500,000 needed to purchase and protect Archers Green.

A massive thank you to everyone who has contributed so far, whether that has been by donating, sharing news of our appeal with your family, friends, and colleagues, or taking part in a fundraising event or challenge. Please do continue to help spread the word and give support to the campaign and the future of Archers Green and its wildlife.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

You can keep tabs on the appeal and see our totaliser in real-time at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/archersgreen](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/archersgreen)



## Running for wildlife



A huge thank you and best of luck to Trust member, Rebecca Fincham, who's currently out running three times a week as she prepares for the Kew Gardens Half Marathon on 2nd April 2023 to raise money for Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

Rebecca told the Trust: "It's very cheery running in winter, with my music up loud. The main challenges in my

training have been running on ice (for which I thankfully have some trail shoes), running up hills and resisting the temptation to stop and take photos of every interesting plant, creature or view I see!"



## Donate

Feeling inspired by Rebecca and would like to challenge yourself for wildlife? Then please visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/challenge-yourself](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/challenge-yourself) or drop us a message at [fundraising@hmwt.org](mailto:fundraising@hmwt.org)



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

If you would like to sponsor Rebecca, please visit her [JustGiving page](https://justgiving.com/fundraising/rebecca-fincham) [justgiving.com/fundraising/rebecca-fincham](https://justgiving.com/fundraising/rebecca-fincham)



## Wild gift ideas

Struggling to find a meaningful gift for a friend or family member who loves wildlife? Why not treat them to one of our wildlife sponsorship packs or a gift membership? There are seven sponsorship packs to choose from (including Barn Owl, Hedgehog, Small Blue Butterfly and Water Vole), and each contains a personalised certificate, fact cards, a beautiful photo of your sponsored local species and more. Our wildlife sponsorship packs and gift memberships make great birthday or anniversary gifts for someone special.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

For further information and to explore the full range of wildlife gifts online, please visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/shop)



## A tribute to the late Roy Henshall Thornley

Roy was born on 24th December 1934 into a farming family in Staffordshire and throughout his life he took an active interest in the welfare of the British countryside. He joined the Trust as a member in 1997 and later became a dedicated volunteer in our office, a role he continued for close to 18 years. Roy was utterly dependable. He came to the office each week, arriving early and immediately getting on quietly and diligently with the task at hand. He was considered an integral member of the Trust team - compiling Welcome Packs for new members and preparing letters as well as other regular mailings to our supporters. We are hugely grateful to Roy for his incredible help and support over so many years and truly appreciated his passion for the Trust's values. He was a clever, humble and delightful man who is greatly missed by all the staff and volunteers he worked with at the Trust.



## In remembrance

We would like to thank long-standing member Dorothea Joan Godman for kindly leaving a gift to the Trust in her will. We are extremely grateful for her generous support over the years and for thoughtfully remembering the Trust in this special way. We also share our thanks and condolences with the friends and family of Sandra Dorsett-Bailey, Jean Gray, David Timothy Grayson, Jaroslav Kavalir, Ernest Leahy, David Leigh, David Saville and Robert Thorogood who kindly donated to the Trust in their memory. These donations make a lasting contribution to our local conservation work and help ensure that the wildlife their loved ones cherished is protected for years to come.



Tewin Orchard © Charlotte Hussey



## In memory of nature lover: Nigel Edward Agar

Nigel was born near Leicester in 1936 and had a lifelong love of nature. Having moved to Hitchin in the 1960s, Nigel wrote a regular, rural walks column entitled 'On Foot with Nigel Agar,' for The Comet local newspaper. In the mid-1970s, Nigel began a bird survey of Watery Grove, and became warden of this Oak and Hornbeam woodland, west of Stevenage. For fourteen years Watery Grove was a HMWT reserve which steadily improved as a wildlife habitat and where visitors enjoyed carpets of Bluebells in the spring. When Nigel became warden of Hexton Chalk Pit, he was sometimes accompanied by his sons, Jon and Robert, and daughter, Judith. Together they enjoyed the Bee, Pyramidal, Common Spotted, and fragrant Orchids in the summer, and visits to the reserve in conversation with his Dad, sparked Jon's enthusiasm for botany. In 1988 Nigel added the nearby Telegraph Hill to his warden responsibilities and this steep, chalk hill also became a regular location for family outings. Nigel sadly passed away in 2022 and is greatly missed by his family, friends and everyone at the Trust who knew him. The three reserves benefitted immeasurably from Nigel's dedication and commitment, for which the Trust will always be incredibly grateful.

## Thank you

A big thank you to the Henrietta & Graham Somervell Wildlife Trust for awarding us a grant of £3,000, which is being allocated to veteran tree care at our Tewin Orchard Nature Reserve and to the Bugs Matter Citizen Science project.



# Your Wild SPRING

**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.



Tim Hill © Frieda Rummenhohl



Whitethroat singing © Andrew Parkinson 2020VISION

## Be Still

As well as all our lives becoming dominated by screens of one sort or another, we are also constantly bombarded by artificial noise – traffic, aircraft, sirens, telephones, the buzz of neon lighting. All this noise means that we are losing touch with the voice of nature – the beautiful sounds generated by the natural world and the animals living in it.

For me, April is the perfect month to be still and listen. It is the month when the natural world goes into overdrive – everything is growing and animals are doing their best to find a mate to create the next generation. Where better to start than the dawn chorus? If you have any young charges – children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews – make a plan to get up early and have a 'dawn adventure' to see the sun come up and listen to the birds welcoming the new day. It'll be even more enticing if it involves a special breakfast. Ideally you and your young listeners should be up and in place an hour before dawn – that's 05:30 at the beginning of the month and 04:30 at the end! If you have to travel to your listening place you'll need to

leave extra time for that too. You don't necessarily have to travel though – back gardens or the local park can be great places to listen too. Once in place, settle down, close your eyes and just listen – this is something we do all too rarely. Depending on the ages of the children, you could break up your listening into short sessions then have a chat about what they've heard. Ask them how many different types of bird song there are? Which is their favourite and why? Get them to sing their favourite. When they open their eyes, can they see the bird that's making the song? If they were a bird what sort of song would they sing? The important thing for me is not to get too hung up on identifying all the birds but to just let the children (and yourselves) enjoy

a moment of stillness with nature's soundtrack.

Some of the best places to enjoy the dawn chorus are the Trust's nature reserves, including Cassiobury Park in Watford and King's Meads in Ware, where we'll be holding dawn chorus events in May, as well as Old Park Wood in Harefield, Balls Wood at Hertford Heath, and Fir and Pond Woods near Potters Bar.



FIND OUT MORE

### Online

Gem up on the calls of some of our warblers here: [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/dawnchorus](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/dawnchorus)  
Check out our Dawn Chorus Walks at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events)



Ashy Mining Bee © Chris Lawrence

## Sensing Spring

### See this:

Look down and watch out for Ashy Mining Bees digging their nesting holes in grassland, maybe even in your lawn!

### Smell this:

Immerse yourself in the savoury scent of Hedge Garlic which is common along woodland rides and sunny edges.

### Hear this:

As dusk falls listen for the 'tuck, tuck, tuck' of Blackbirds, as they finish feeding and head to roost.

### Feel this:

Get up before dawn, enjoy the cool of first light before basking in the blissful gentle warmth of the sun as it rises.



Your Wild  
SPRING

# The Ferrari of the Bird World

Cuckoos arrive back in the UK from their African wintering grounds in April with the first record a traditional news story in The Times newspaper. However, the bulk of birds arrive during May and this is the best time to hear and possibly see these elusive migrants. Traditionally the best place to go searching is in our river valleys where they target Reed Warblers to host their young. I would recommend the main viewpoint at Amwell Nature Reserve where there is a panoramic view over reedbeds and a large breeding population of their hosts. Alternatively, Oughtonhead Common near Hitchin has been reliable in recent years. Soon after arrival, males

perch prominently in trees and pairs can be seen courting by flying around after one another. During this time, you will hear the bubbly trill of the female as well as the classic 'cook-koo' of the male. In flight, Cuckoos look like a small grey falcon – one of the most aerodynamic birds of all to my eyes – sleek and rounded but slightly pointy at the same time, not unlike a Ferrari SF90 Stradale with wings!

Sadly, the song of the Cuckoo is becoming increasingly difficult to hear – it's now 'Red Listed' in the UK because of a long-term severe breeding population decline. Whilst well-studied as a breeding bird, little was known about it after it leaves

this country, other than it spends the winter in African countries such as Cameroon. Research led by the British Trust for Ornithology is now unravelling the mystery of its movements by fitting birds with tiny satellite trackers. One of the most amazing things I learned is that some birds are already back in Africa by July!



FIND OUT MORE

Online

Find out more at [bto.org/our-science/projects/cuckoo-tracking-project](https://bto.org/our-science/projects/cuckoo-tracking-project)

# Suggestions to experience and enjoy spring

- Keep it local. Continue a local walk, saunter it weekly, seeing how the land changes as the days lengthen and warm. Make a note of the wildlife you see and hear in hedgerows and meadows and marvel at how quickly some of the flowers come and go.
- Put 'em up, put 'em up! I loved the nervous bravado of the cowardly Lion in the Wizard of Oz but spring means that female Brown Hares really do have to 'put 'em up'. It's the time of year that they have to fight off the (sometimes) unwelcome attention of hormone-driven males looking to pass their genes onto the next generation. In my experience, the chalky fields around Therfield provide one of the best chances of seeing this harey punch-up. Alternatively, the fields around the Trust's Hawkins Wood Nature Reserve are also worth a look albeit that the reserve itself is currently closed due to concerns over public safety related to Ash dieback.
- Go in search of grizzlies! In early May visit the Trust's Waterford Heath Nature Reserve just outside Hertford. Park in the Vicarage Lane car park and walk onto the north heath. Find a vantage point overlooking a south facing slope where there are the yellow flowers of Creeping Cinquefoil. With patience you should be

treated to views of our very own grizzlies, the Grizzled Skipper butterfly. You may even see a mating pair and if you look very closely, you may be able to see the female laying eggs on the leaves of the Cinquefoil or Wild Strawberry, their larval foodplants.

- Head to Amwell Nature Reserve and enjoy a Barbara Cartland moment. For those too young to remember her, Barbara was an author of 723 romantic novels and known for always wearing extravagant pink dresses. I like to think she was inspired by one of our showiest wild flowers, the Early Marsh Orchid, present in their hundreds at Amwell during June. If you would like to join us for this spectacle in pink, Dan Townsend, Senior Reserves Officer and I will be leading a guided walk at the site on 4 June. See back cover for more details.



Hares boxing © Russell Savory



FIND OUT MORE

Online

To find out more about any of the nature reserves mentioned, visit [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves) or if you'd like to search for more information about a certain species, simply type the name into our wildlife explorer here [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer](https://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-explorer)



Enjoy free of charge



# Create more space for wildlife - Make a wildlife pond!



The best thing you can do to help wildlife in your patch is to create a pond. People and Wildlife Officer, Josh Kalms explains why and how.

Think chalk river margins, coastal rainforests and rockpools... environments where land meets water are usually supercharged for wildlife! Ponds support a huge range of species.

As well as an impressive diversity living in and on the water, ponds are wonderful for our terrestrial wildlife. They supply drinking water, shelter and a supply of both insect and plant-based food.

Over 75% of ponds have been lost in the last century. That's almost 1 million ponds, along with all the biodiversity they supported, vanished from the UK landscape. We can collectively help reverse this by creating our own ponds for wildlife.

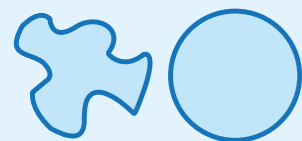
When planning a pond, dive into the mind of the wildlife you are trying to attract and conserve; be it a frog, dragonfly nymph, or the rather squishy head of a hoverfly larva - each will have different requirements, but they can all be catered for with a well-planned pond. Here are some tips to get you started:

## Position - make your pond a sunny, central feature

To enjoy your pond the most, plan for it to be a focal point of the garden. For instance, consider digging up a section of lawn right next to a patio area, or where it's easily seen from your home. A sunny area is best. Avoid siting it under a tree or in deep shade.

## Maximise your margins

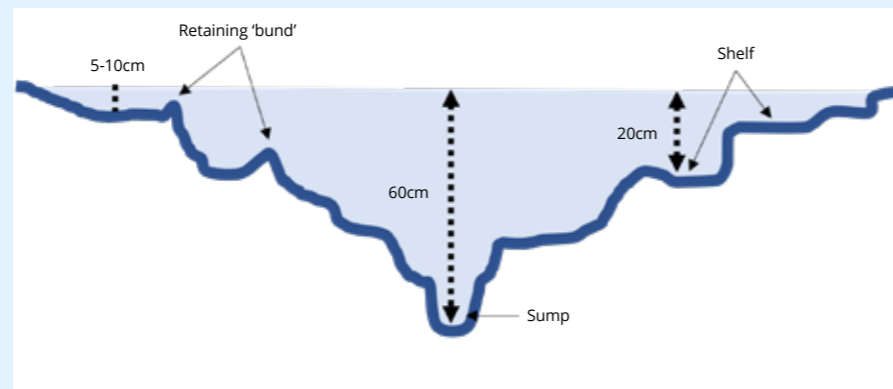
Shallow margins and edges are most important as they will be home to the most wildlife. Consider a wiggly edge rather than a perfect circle - the squiggly shape has 20% more margin!



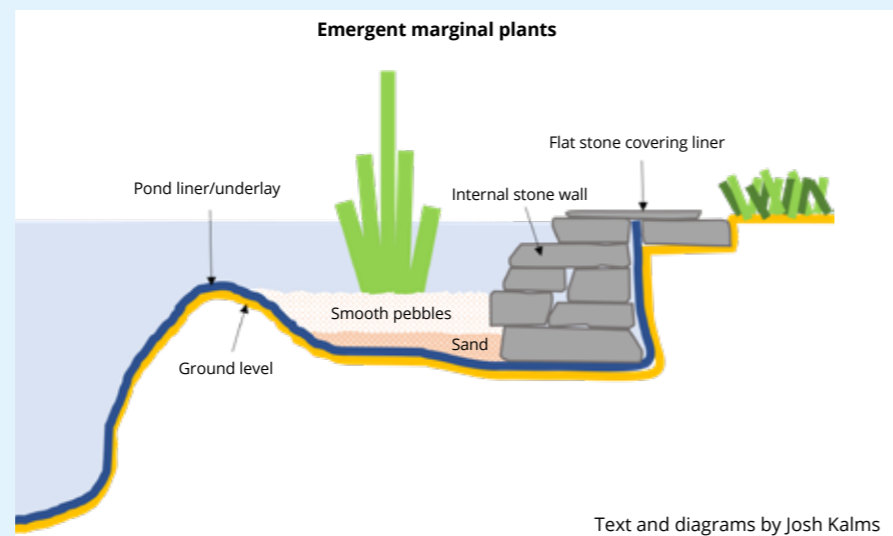
Garden pond © Tom Marshall

## Depths and profile, plan before you dig!

Deeper areas provide refuges in drier months. Shelves will create spots for animals to spawn and will allow for the placement of pond plants. A deeper pit in the middle will form a shelter in freezing conditions.



Be sure to include raised ridges and mounds as part of the profile of the pond. These act as 'retaining bunds' which, once the pond has been lined, you can fill behind with pebbles or sand. You can plant into these without worrying about the material falling away and this can also be a good way to hide the liner.



Text and diagrams by Josh Kalms

## Planting

To make your pond the best it can be for wildlife, try to include a variety of plant types: *edge* (Marsh Marigold, Iris, Water Forget-me-not), *floating* (Frogbit) and *submerged* (Water Crowfoot, Hornwort). Deturf or clear a bit of extra ground around the pond for additional planting such as Greater Birds-foot Trefoil, Betony and Common Knapweed - they'll be popular with pollinators (excuse the pun!)

## Arrival of wildlife

Akin to a pot noodle, just after adding water, wildlife can arrive as the new pond fills.

Within the first year, you might expect:

- **Under the water:** Tiny animals like Copepods, Daphnia and Ostracods. Flatworms, water beetles, Water Boatmen, freshwater shrimps, Water Slaters, Mayfly, Caddisfly and Hoverfly larvae, dragonfly and damselfly nymphs
- **On and around the pond:** Pond Skaters skating, bees drinking and pollinating, Broad-bodied Chaser dragonflies and Large Red Damselflies hovering, birds sipping and bathing, Pipistrelle bats hunting
- **And, in time:** Frogs, toads, newts, Hedgehogs

## Other thoughts:

- Bare mud, damp logs and sun lit rocks can boost invertebrate interest and create micro habitats for wildlife.
- Don't add goldfish, they'll eat almost everything else!
- Only use native plants when planting - avoid invasive species.
- Include an area to get closer to the pond and observe how it develops and changes; be sure to keep everyone safe by making a barrier to restrict access by young children or dogs.
- Install a water butt and use the overflow to keep your pond topped up.
- Show your neighbours the new pond, hopefully they'll be encouraged to create their own!

Here are some photos of the pond I created in my Nana's garden taken over a three-week period - a visual guide to show just how quickly a pond can start to become established.



## No space eh? Oh yes you have!

A pond doesn't have to be a large, elaborate feature! Even the smallest of ponds will be used by wildlife and creating a mini wildlife pond is a hugely fun activity. Here's how:

- Take a watertight container about 30cm deep
- Place in a hole in the ground
- Add logs or rocks so terrestrial wildlife can access the pond
- Fill it up with water.

If you don't have a watertight container to hand, line a plant pot with a section of pond liner, someone's offcuts will do\*. You don't even need a garden - so long as wildlife can hop in and out, all you need is a front step to attract life to your new pot-puddle!

## Want something even simpler?

**Try this:** Leave a tray (5-10cm deep) in a partly sunny place and let it fill with rain, place some moss, sticks or logs in it. I did this partly accidentally in our garden and when I checked back a week later, amazing! Hundreds of mayfly nymphs were living there, sharing the water with snorkelling young hoverflies and bright red Chironomid larvae. Such an easy win.



FIND OUT MORE

## Online

I hope I have proved how fantastic a wildlife pond can be. If you want advice or to chat through your pond plans, please email [wildersupport@hmwt.org](mailto:wildersupport@hmwt.org). Inspired to find out more? Head to our website for step-by-step instructions about how to build a pond, make a mini pond or create a bog garden. [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/actions](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/actions)

\* Trust members are welcome to collect a pond liner offcut from the Wildlife Garden at Grebe House - these will be available on a first come, first served basis.





# What's On

We've already got lots of exciting events scheduled for spring and into early summer and we're adding more all the time. Here's a taster of what's on offer but make sure to check our events pages on the website to see what else is happening near you. Many of our events are free to attend and lots are suitable for families. Please note, that places are limited, so we encourage you to sign-up as soon as you can to avoid disappointment.

## April

- 1-16 April** **Spring Trail**, Panshanger Park
- 5 April** **Creatures of the Night**, Panshanger Park 7.15 - 8.45pm
- 16 April** **Trees in Spring Walk**, Fairlands Valley Park, Stevenage, 10.00am - 12.00pm
- 26 April** **Bluebell Walk**, Whippendell Woods, 10:00 - 11:30am

## May

- 7 May** **Dawn Chorus Walks**, Cassiobury Park (4:45 - 7:00am) and King's Meads (5:00 - 6:30am)
- 10 May** **Bat Walk**, Home Farm Glamping, Elstree, 8:30 - 10:00pm
- 13 May** **Coronation Oak Walk**, Panshanger Park, 10:30am - 12:00pm

## June

- 1 June** **Smartphone Safari - Learn how to take amazing wildlife photos using your smartphone**, Grebe House Wildlife Garden, St Albans, 10:30am - 12:30pm
- 4 June** **Orchids and Dragonflies**, Amwell, 2.00pm - 4.00pm
- 8 June** **Butterflies for Beginners**, Online talk, 7:00 - 8:30pm

- 21 June** **Wildflowers of the Chalk Grassland Walk**, King's Meads, 10:00 - 11:15am

## July

- 12 July** **Dragonflies of King's Meads Walk**, King's Meads, 10:00 - 11:30am

## Festival Time!

As well as our own programme of events, we'll also be popping up at some great community events. Come and see us at:

- 22 April** **Earth Day**, Frogmore Paper Mill, Apsley, Hemel Hempstead
- 20 and 21 May** **Rickmansworth Festival**
- 17 June** **Harpenden Summer Carnival**, Harpenden Common
- 8 July** **Wildfest**, Cassiobury Park, Watford

Join an eventFIND OUT MORE  
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Find out more and book your spot at [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/events)