

Wild Staffordshire



A WILDER FUTURE

Capturing carbon

Why healthy natural
landscapes are a key
weapon in tackling
climate change

WISE UP

Learn about the secret
lives of tawny owls

HEROIC HEDGES

Discover the wildlife that
thrives in our hedgerows



Welcome

to our winter magazine



At the end of September, the Prime Minister pledged to protect 30 per cent of the UK's land to support nature's recovery by 2030.

The announcement coincided with the launch of The Wildlife Trusts' nationwide public appeal to raise £30 million to return 30 per cent of land and sea to nature by 2030.

And while we welcome the PM's promise, there is confusion around delivering this ambition.

The Government seems to think there is more land currently protected for nature than is actually the case. Downing Street has explained that "existing National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other protected areas already comprise approximately 26 per cent of land in England" - meaning that only an additional 4 per cent was needed to meet the target. However, a beautiful view doesn't always equal a thriving ecosystem. Our National Parks and AONBs are landscape not wildlife designations, and many of these places are severely depleted of wildlife. In Staffordshire, just 4 per cent of land is protected for nature.

What we really need is urgent action on the ground to ensure that 30 per cent of our green and pleasant land is genuinely supporting nature's recovery. This starts with the creation of Nature Recovery Network maps – laying out a joined up vision showing how our land can be repaired and ecologically connected. We all need to buy into this – everyone from business leaders to local authorities and communities. If we don't, the collapse of the natural world and the climate crisis will impact on us all.

Investing into the restoration of natural, wildlife-rich landscapes will benefit all of us. We must let nature help us solve some of the critical issues facing society. Healthy ecosystems will increase our resilience to climate change, and provide nature-based solutions to modern problems such as air pollution and destructive floods.

If this Government is serious about its ambition to leave the environment in a better state for future generations, it must create the legislative framework that is needed to accomplish this, through an Agriculture Bill that upholds high environmental protections and rewards farmers for managing their land in an environmentally-sensitive way, and by introducing a strong Environment Bill that will deliver real action on the ground.

Julian

Chief Executive, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust



Staffordshire Wildlife Trust *Get in touch*

Wild Staffordshire is the membership magazine for **Staffordshire Wildlife Trust**

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Wherever you are in the UK, your Wildlife Trust is standing up for wildlife and wild places in your area and bringing people closer to nature.

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All other photos © SWT unless stated

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Barn Owl Action Group

Staffordshire Fungi Group

Staffordshire Mammal Group

Staffordshire Bat Group

Staffordshire Invertebrate Group

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Learn more about the ways we are working with nature to reduce flood risk

PAUL HOBSON

MATTHEW ROBERTS

6 ways to get involved with your local Wildlife Trust

Volunteer Could you donate your skills and time to look after wildlife? We have a wide range of indoor and outdoor roles. staffs-wildlife.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering

Campaigning You can play a vital role in raising awareness, and lobbying, on local and national issues. staffs-wildlife.org.uk/what-we-do/campaigns

Shop Our online and visitor centre shops stock a great range of nature-related items. All proceeds go to our conservation work. staffs-wildlife.org.uk/support-us/online-shop

Donate to an appeal From purchasing land to protecting species, we need your support. staffs-wildlife.org.uk/support-us/make-donation

Local groups Join one of our network of local groups and help make a difference where you live. staffs-wildlife.org.uk/get-involved/local-groups

Leave a legacy If you've had a lifetime's pleasure from nature, help ensure its future. staffs-wildlife.org.uk/support-us/leave-gift-your-will

Your wild winter

The best of the season's wildlife and where to enjoy it in Staffordshire

WINTER GUEST

Cold caller

Redwings fly some 500 miles from Scandinavia and Russia to spend the winter in the UK, starting to arrive on our shores in October. Flocks devour fruit, so look for them on berry-laden hedgerows and in orchards while out in the countryside. If the temperature drops and food becomes scarce, they will often venture into gardens - leave chopped apples to tempt them onto your patch. These members of the thrush family are easily identified by the orange-red patches under their wings.

SEE THEM THIS WINTER

- **Cannock Chase** Flocks of redwing and fieldfare are frequently spotted in the open scrubby areas of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- **Highgate Common, nr Wombourne** Our warden Hayley often saw (and heard!) redwings while out and about on this heathland reserve in winter 2019.
- **Brankley Pastures, nr Barton-under-Needwood** Look for winter thrushes feasting on berries in the hedgerows at this reserve.



Thank you

Thanks to your membership, we have been able to plant 5km of hedgerows at Brankley Pastures, providing bountiful winter berries for birds such as redwings and fieldfares.

Foxes can be heard during the winter months making their distinctive mating calls at night



Night noises

Foxes have adapted to life in urban environments and are now frequently seen trotting along streets or sniffing around gardens at night. During the winter months, even if you don't see one, you may hear one as they become much more vocal. If you've ever heard a pained cry in the dead of night that sounds like a woman screaming, then you've probably heard a female fox (or 'vixen') letting a male (or 'dog') fox know that she is ready to mate. These screams are often answered by the 'hup-hup-hup' bark of the dog fox. The mating season takes place in January, and if you feed foxes in your garden you may notice that their visits stop temporarily, with mating taking priority.

HAS A FOX VISITED?

» There are signs to look out for, including droppings and footprints. Foxes also like to play with things that smell good, such as gardening gloves that have been left out!

JON HAWKINS SURREY HILLS PHOTOGRAPHY



Lichen come in an amazing array of colours and shapes

JOY RUSSELL

URBAN FIELDCRAFT

Take a closer look at lichen

Grab a magnifying glass and take a good look on walls, trees and stones while you're out and about. Soon enough you will come across lichen. Despite often going unnoticed, lichen are a fascinating and vital part of the natural world. They're made up of two organisms, an alga and a fungus (and sometimes a cyanobacteria), living together symbiotically. There are some 1,700 different species of lichen in the UK, comprising many different shapes and sizes. Lichen are a valuable part of the ecosystem, providing nesting materials for many birds and food

for moths and butterflies. They reduce carbon dioxide levels and some species are a good indicator of air quality, as they are sensitive to pollution. **How to get to know lichens** » **Take part in a lichen survey** The British Lichen Society is inviting novice lichenologists to take part in its Twenty Common Lichen project. Download an identification chart and see how many you can discover: **britishlichensociety.org.uk/activities/twenty-common-lichens**



SEE THIS

Just before dusk, huge flocks of starlings gather together in a 'murmuration' to perform a spectacular swirling sky dance.

DO THIS

Make a bird feeder packed with high-energy treats for the birds this winter using a pine cone or yoghurt pot. wildlifewatch.org.uk/make-bird-feeder

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Tawny owl

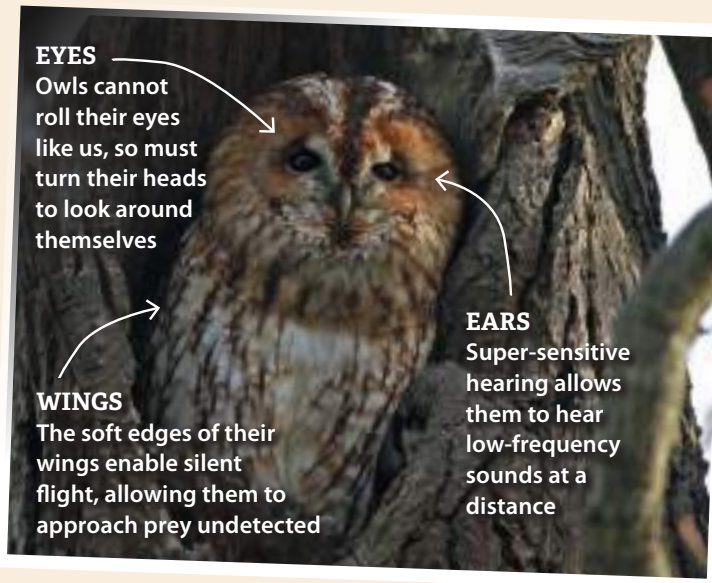
The haunting call of the tawny owl is more likely to be heard in winter, as youngsters seek out new territories. The Trust's Steven Cheshire offers an insight into these special birds.

Nighttime hunter

Being nocturnal, tawny owls spend much of the day hidden away in their woodland habitat. Their plumage - chestnut-brown streaked with dark brown and black - provides the perfect camouflage against tree bark, making them invisible to all but those with the keenest eye. As dusk approaches and darkness falls, the tawny owl begins to stir. They use their large brown-black eyes to see in the dark and their facial disc focuses the sounds of prey towards their highly sensitive ears.

Ancient woodland home

Tree hollows are vital if tawny owls are to breed. Large blocks of ancient broadleaf woodland are key to the survival of this enigmatic species. These woodlands also provide abundant food in the form of small mammals, birds, frogs, fish, and insects such as beetles and worms. They will also frequent rural and suburban gardens and open spaces too, as long as there are plenty of large, mature trees to hide in during the day. Some pairs may even breed in gardens if there is a suitable hollow tree such as a gnarly old oak that provides shelter for bringing up their young.



EYES
Owls cannot roll their eyes like us, so must turn their heads to look around themselves

WINGS
The soft edges of their wings enable silent flight, allowing them to approach prey undetected

EARS
Super-sensitive hearing allows them to hear low-frequency sounds at a distance



Tawny owl chicks can be fed by their parents for up to three months

Close relationship

Once paired, both the male and female will call to each other, especially during the autumn and winter months. The distinctive call isn't made by a single bird, but instead made by a male and female calling to each other. The female makes a 'too-wit' sound and the male answers with 'too-woo!'. The female lays a clutch of two - three eggs in March. Sadly, tawny owl numbers are declining.

HELP TAWNY OWLS

▶▶ Man-made nest boxes are simple to construct and are readily used: see diagram, right. The box should be mounted vertically against a large mature tree trunk, at least 3.7m (12") high.



Top tips 3 SPECIES TO SPOT

Winter moth

As its name suggests, this common species is on the wing from late Autumn through to early February.



JEFF DELONGE (ENTOMART)

Hawfinch

Winter is the best time of year to spot this shy bird, feeding in the treetops on seeds and leaf buds.



JON HAWKINS

Mistletoe

This evergreen parasitic plant is most obvious in winter when most trees have dropped their leaves.



ZSUZSANNA BIRD

DO THIS

Winter is the best time of year to plant a native tree in your garden for wildlife, providing the ground is not too wet or frozen. Consider a goat willow or rowan.

FORAGE FOR THIS

Make jewel-coloured sloe gin, or use the fruit of the blackthorn tree in jams, jellies and syrup. Sloes should be squasy before harvesting - go picking after the first frost.



NOT JUST FOR KIDS

Seven ways to enjoy nature this winter

Why should kids have all the fun? Reignite your love of nature with these wild activities

1 Help a hog

During winter, while hedgehogs are hibernating, why not make your garden into a prickly paradise? Let a quiet area of your garden go 'wild' - allow the grass to grow long and pile up a few sticks and logs. This will encourage insects and slugs which hedgehogs love to eat. If the weather goes mild, leave meat-based dog food and fresh water in a shallow dish out for spiky visitors.

Make prickly pathways! Cut a small hole (five inch square) in the bottom of your fence or gravel board to allow hedgehogs to move freely between gardens. Ready made versions are available from www.jacksons-fencing.co.uk/hedgehog-fencing
More ideas: staffs-wildlife.org.uk/helpahedgehog



IMAGE COURTESY OF JACKSONS FENCING



2 Seedy snack

Scrape the seeds from your pumpkin and rinse them clean. In a large baking tray, drizzle olive oil over the seeds, sprinkle with sea salt and mix together well. Bake at 180°C/350°F/gas 4 for 10 minutes, until seeds are lightly golden brown and then leave to cool.

SLOES - AMY LEWIS

3 Go on a wild adventure!

Are you a wild child looking for an adventure?

Then look no further! Our Wild Child Adventure pack contains graded activities from barefoot

walks to bird watching and scavenger hunts! Work your way through the different levels to gain valuable Wild Child Adventurer skills and a Wild Child certificate. Suitable for all ages. staffs-wildlife.org.uk/wild-child-adventure-pack



4 Breathe in nature

Many studies have shown that spending time outside in nature is good for us. On a clear winter's day, get the endorphins buzzing with an outdoor yoga session. Great for kids and adults alike, the combination of gentle stretching and breathing is calming and restorative. Sign up for our free Get Wild at Home initiative to get access to online sessions at staffs-wildlife.org.uk/wildathome



DAVID TIPLING/2020VISION

5 Make a masterpiece in the wild

Create artwork in the wild using leaves, pine cones, twigs, feathers - whatever is to hand. Leave it somewhere - on a branch, by a path, by a bench - and it will make a lovely surprise for someone else to enjoy. For inspiration, visit www.pinterest.co.uk/wildlifetrusts/nature-art





6 Goopy indulgence
Indulge your sweet tooth and make some goopy s'mores over a campfire. S'mores are a popular treat in the US, and are made by sandwiching a melted marshmallow between two biscuits. Start by building a campfire safely using a firepit or a baking tray. Create a pyramid of dry sticks and grasses and light carefully. Melt marshmallows in the fire on the end of a stick and once ready, squish between two biscuits of your choice. Enjoy!



7 Make a Christmas wreath for birds
Treat our feathered friends to a festive feast and decorate your garden with a bountiful natural wreath.

YOU WILL NEED

- Pine cones, long twigs, holly and other leaves
- Bird seed, bread crumbs, grated cheese, dried fruit and nuts
- Mixing bowl
- Garden wire
- Soft lard

WHAT TO DO

1. Twist together bundles of long twigs and use garden wire to fashion into a ring.
2. Squish lard into a soft paste in a bowl. Mix in bird seed, breadcrumbs and grated cheese. Smear over pine cones and decorate with fruits and nuts.
3. Attach the cones to the ring with garden wire.
4. Decorate with festive greenery and hang up your wreath.

A close-up photograph of a robin wearing a red Santa hat with a white pom-pom. The robin has a bright orange-red breast and grey wings.

**With Special Guest
Host Mike Dilger of
BBC's The One Show**

A circular inset photograph of Mike Dilger, a man in a blue jacket and cap, smiling and holding binoculars.

Raising funds for our Craddocks Moss appeal

Christmas Quiz
Saturday December 12, 5pm

Join our online festive quiz and test your nature knowledge! Fun for all the family, with picture rounds and 'What's that sound?' questions.

Book at
www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/
Christmasquiz

A small illustration of holly leaves and red berries in the bottom right corner of the red box.

One of the stars of Brankley Pastures: a veteran oak tree that supports a myriad of wildlife

Discover Brankley Pastures

Love trees? Come and marvel at the veteran oaks at Brankley Pastures, near Barton-under-Needwood. On this reserve, the Trust is working on a long-term project to restore the ancient wood pasture and create a home for the next generation of veterans. Reserves officer Lucy O'toole shows you around.

1 From the car park go through the kissing gate into the field. Within the soil, thousands of wildflower seeds lie dormant, waiting for the warmth of spring. By the end of summer, meadow flowers such as ox-eye daisy and knapweed will be flourishing, providing a nectar stop for many insects. Follow the hedge line down the side of the field, and you will see two gates. Take the second gate on the left.

2 The fields in this part of the nature reserve have mainly been left to regenerate naturally, and you will see a variety of species growing, including ash and willow. As you walk through the field you will notice tree guards dotted around, which protect the young trees. Some of the trees have grown naturally, while others have been planted by volunteers to increase the species diversity. Some of the oaks in this field are hundreds of years old, and are spectacular to look at.

3 Continue through the kissing gate and across the bridge, following the path up the field. You will see silver birch growing here. This species is known as a 'pioneer species', as it is often the first to appear following natural regeneration. Continue through the kissing gate at the top of the field, and follow the path up toward the woodland. Last winter, our

Look for the acrobatic nuthatch nimbly scaling tree trunks in the woodland



NEIL ALDRIDGE

NOW YOU DO IT

Visit Brankley Pastures

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Location: Brankley Pastures is situated 2.5 miles north-west of Barton-under-Needwood in East Staffordshire. Nearest postcode: DE13 8BN.

How to get there: Take the B5016 about 0.75 miles west to Barton Gate. Turn right and, in 0.25 miles, go left. After a further 0.5 miles go over a crossroads and continue along this road for approximately 0.25 miles. The parking area is on the left hand side.

Opening times: Open at all times.

Access: Fairly flat but steep in places. Rugged paths, muddy in parts. Contact the Trust for more detailed access information.

Phone: 01889 880100

Email: info@staffs-wildlife.org.uk

Website: www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/nature-reserves/brankley-pastures

TOP WILDLIFE TO SPOT

Buzzard: Listen for the 'kee-yaa' call of this bird of prey as it soars over the reserve.

Green woodpecker: This striking olive green bird may be spotted climbing tree trunks or hopping on the ground as it searches for ants to eat.



Can you spot a green woodpecker searching for ants?

Fungi: Search for an array of fungi on the old trees and deadwood, as the fungi season draws to a close.

THINGS TO DO

▶▶ Seek out the old, gnarly oak trees, which are a unique feature of Brankley Pastures. Investigate the holes and crevices inside their huge trunks. Try hugging one! Can you link your hands together and make a ring around the tree? The decaying wood in these trees is home to a myriad of insects. See how many you can spot.

Thank you

Our amazing conservation volunteers have been busy 'hedgelaying' over the last two winters. This traditional technique improves the structure of the hedges for wildlife.



volunteers undertook some tree thinning here as the woodland was very dense. Thinning benefits the woodland and wildlife. The structure of the woodland becomes more diverse and more light can reach the woodland floor, enabling other plants and woodland flowers to flourish.

4 Before you enter the woodland, pause to admire the hedge which runs down the side of the field you have just walked up. This was 'laid' by the volunteers over the last two winters, and looks splendid come spring time. Hedgelaying is a traditional maintenance technique which prolongs the life of a hedge and provides habitat and shelter for wildlife. Go through the kissing gate into the woodland, as you walk through the wood you will see some more veteran oak trees.

DID YOU KNOW A mature oak tree can support over 280 different species of insects, and these in turn are an important food source for many birds. Squirrels, jays and badgers will feed on acorns, and even their fallen leaves rot down and help improve the fertility of the soil beneath.

5 As you emerge from the woodland, go through the kissing gate and keep right. There is another gate on this fence line which you need to go through when you are ready to head back to the car park. But before you do, make sure you take a look around first. This is the oldest part of the reserve, and is an example of wooded pasture. Here you will notice several veteran oak trees. Give them a hug, and you will realise just how big they are! In autumn and into winter a variety of fungi grow in this area. When you've finished exploring, head through the kissing gate and walk back through the wood, and you will arrive at the top of the field.

6 This field is divided by a path - follow this down the hill. Next to the path is a strip of ground called a 'beetle bank'. Left to grow wild, it provides habitat for beetles and other invertebrates. Crops such as oats and barley are grown in the fields either side. These benefit wildlife by offering cover and seed over the summer months. At the bottom of the hill turn left and follow the track until you see a small bridge on your right. Cross this and then walk up the hill to the car park.

The Natural Health Service



Living through lockdown gave many people a new appreciation of the natural world. Our experiences reinforced the mounting scientific evidence that connecting with nature is good for us – both physically and mentally. Among the most recent research was a survey conducted by Natural England during April – June this year, in which 85 per cent of participants reported that being in nature made them feel happy. A study conducted by the University of East Anglia in 2018 revealed that populations that have greater access to greenspace are more likely to report overall good health – including a reduced the risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, premature death, preterm birth, stress, high blood pressure and more. The benefits are now so well documented that in October the Government announced funding for four ‘green prescribing’ pilot schemes. Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has long recognised the positive impact that the natural world has on wellbeing. This ethos is firmly embedded in the Trust’s work, and runs through many of our everyday activities, such as volunteering and our working with young people and communities. We asked people in Staffordshire to get in touch with us to share their stories about how engaging nature had been beneficial to their health. These personal experiences really demonstrate the healing power of nature, and how it can help through difficult times.



Rowan, nine, with the hedgehog house he built.



Providing joy in uncertain times

Nature was a reassuring constant for actor Hannah Kimpton-Beeley, from Eccleshall, whose work dried up during lockdown.

“With lockdown, came the closure of theatres and the arts in general. As an actor and business role-player, this meant that for a good while my work stopped. Life was uncertain, unknown and what had been familiar had gone. My children, Ptolemy, 11, and Rowan, nine, were now at home, all the time! James, my husband, and an NHS physiotherapist in the community continued with work, busier than ever. Yet for me and my boys, everything had changed. It was intense, especially mentally. Then the realisation came. We did have a constant, surrounding us and carrying on regardless of lockdown. The natural world. Our small garden became our little sanctuary. We had noticed a hedgehog at our neighbours over the road. So Rowan decided a hog house was needed. The making of the house, out of discarded bricks, plastic guttering, and straw lifted the spirits. One evening, we discovered a large adult hedgehog, drinking from our pond. The absolute joy was palpable. From feeling that there was little to get excited about, we suddenly all had loads to be excited about. Life felt rich. The low days brighter. The purpose of life restored. A common interest.”



“Nature has helped me to heal”

Councillor Joe Porter, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, explains how getting out into the natural world helped him to cope after a traumatic experience.

“I’ve been a nature lover since I was very young. I’m passionate about the environment and it is the reason I went into politics. Nature has an incredible effect on both my physical and mental health, and has helped me through some of the darkest times in my life. Some time ago, I was sexually attacked, and found it very hard to cope afterwards. But nature has helped me to heal. I go out regularly for walks and long runs, and I find that the natural sounds and colours have a very calming effect on me. Nature helps me to cut off from any negative thoughts I am having. I think that over the last few months, more and more people have been connecting with nature. During the second half of lockdown, when restrictions were eased, I did a tour of all of the Trust’s nature reserves in the Staffordshire Moorlands. I discovered butterfly orchids and fragrant orchids, and made it my mission to see as many different butterflies as I could. Going out and exploring the natural world was an absolute godsend for me and helped me stay upbeat. Lockdown has been difficult for everyone, but I think one of the positive things that has come out of it is that an appreciation of the nature on our doorsteps has become more mainstream now.”

Exploring the Trust’s nature reserves helps Joe Porter stay mentally healthy and upbeat



“Hard work, in the fresh air, with genuine people, helps you to put your concerns and worries to one side”



After losing his wife to cancer, Russell Forrester’s world fell apart. The retired mental health nurse found that conservation volunteering with the Trust helped him look forward to the future again.

“I was married for 31 years, and lost my wife to cancer in 2015. She was my best mate. During the same period of time my mum was diagnosed with dementia, and my dad had a stroke. My world was falling apart. I had worked as a psychiatric nurse for 35 years, and retired in 2018. During that time I’d helped many people recover from numerous traumas in their lives. Now for the first time I could truly empathise with them.

“Volunteering for me is better than any prescription. Nature knows how to heal.”

Mental illness is indiscriminate, it’s not fussy who it chooses to have a go at next. Money, status and possessions are no guard against mental health issues. We as human beings are all vulnerable, particularly the way we are asked to live our lives today. I started to volunteer with the Trust in 2016, and it was the best thing I could have done. I find that being in the outdoors, with people who have nothing to prove, absolutely amazing. You see people at their best. It’s a very humbling experience.

When you lose somebody or experience any kind of trauma in your life, you can either sink or swim! By volunteering with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust I swam, and love every minute. Hard work, in the fresh air, with genuine people, helps you to put your concerns and worries to one side, and look forward to another day, and whatever the future holds in store. Fresh air, good company and hard physical work are truly a recipe for good mental and physical wellbeing. Volunteering for me is better than any prescription. Nature knows how to heal”.



“Nature lifts my spirits”

Josephine Bailey, of Birches Head, Stoke-on-Trent, was diagnosed with stage three oesophageal cancer in August 2018, and had radical chemoradiotherapy. Engaging with the natural world has helped her improve her fitness and stay positive.

“I was warned it was a horrible cancer to have and a difficult cancer to treat. I was fed via a tube for five months, which was a difficult time and included many visits to hospital. I coped well with the actual treatment, but the sickness, hair loss and other symptoms came afterwards. There were times I couldn't lift my head up. I was given a 15 per cent survival chance, and it would be deemed good should I make it to two years post-treatment. The radiotherapy caused a bad stricture and I am having frequent, ongoing

treatment to try to keep my oesophagus open. It would be very easy to feel negative in these circumstances.

Once the tube was removed, I started to try and rebuild my life, albeit around the ongoing treatment and learning to eat again. I started to go back out into my wildlife garden, feeding the birds again and rediscovered my love of photography. I started to go back to visit my nearest nature reserves, Westport Lake and Ford Green. I am trying to improve my fitness levels and breathing by gentle walking. The more I visited, the more enthusiastic I became and wanted to learn. I value these green spaces more than ever before. I really care passionately about the creatures that live there and bring me so much joy. Being out in the fresh air, engaging with nature, discovering wildlife, takes my mind away from any negative feelings, lifts my spirits and takes my focus away from myself and instils calm.

On days when my mood dips, there is always something happening to look for and get immersed in, even if just outside in the garden. It gives me a reason to get up and get ready for the day, get outside and refill the feeders.

I'm eating pureed meals and still having difficult ongoing treatment, two years after diagnosis. A lot of people have said that they are surprised by how strong and positive I've been. I attribute that, not only to the great support I've received from my medical teams, family and friends, but also by engaging with nature and wildlife around me to keep me positive and stop me dwelling on the negative aspects.”

An antidote to isolation

Visiting a woodland by her home helped retired headteacher Gill Sands, of Barlaston, cope with the isolation of lockdown.

“My husband is a kidney transplant patient and received a letter to say he needed to shield during lockdown. We felt like we had no control over the situation, and both lost confidence during this time and became anxious.

We live very close to Hem Heath Woods, and I started going for walks early in the morning and in the evening when there was no-one about. I had heard a woodpecker a

few times, and one day I managed to track it down and find its nest, high up in a tree. I then saw a chick poking its head out from the hole. I felt very privileged.

I started visiting the nest every day, and it gave me a routine, which helped me. Watching the chick fledging was exciting and uplifting, and I shared it all with my husband when I got home and it cheered him up too.

I've always been a busy person, and when all that stopped felt a bit lost. I think my mental health would have suffered if I hadn't have been able to go walking in the woods. Being with nature makes you feel less alone.”

“Visiting the nest every day gave me a routine.”

In numbers

A study of 20,000 people carried out by the University of Exeter found that those spending at least



120 minutes

in nature a week are significantly more likely to report good health and higher psychological wellbeing than those who don't visit nature at all.

A study of Wildlife Trust volunteers showed that

95%



of participants with low mental wellbeing at the start of conservation volunteering reported an improvement in 6 weeks.

According to research from Natural England, if every household in England were provided with good access to quality green space it could save the NHS an estimated



£2.1 billion

An estimated

1.3 billion kg

of air pollutants were removed by woodlands, plants, grasslands and other UK vegetation in 2015, contributing to improved lung health.

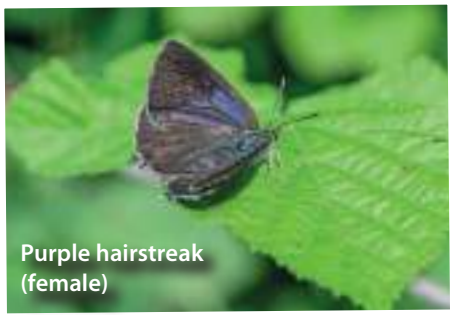


VECTORS DESIGNED BY FREEPIK - WWW.FREEPIK.COM

EXPERT ADVICE

Get your butterfly fix - even in winter!

Of the 56 species of native butterfly found in Britain, nine overwinter as an egg. Three can be found in Staffordshire - can you discover them all? By butterfly expert Steven Cheshire, senior communications officer for Transforming the Trent Valley.



Purple hairstreak (female)

1 PURPLE HAIRSTREAK

A true woodland butterfly which relies on mature Pedunculate Oak and Sessile Oak trees as larval foodplants. Oak trees that were once part of an ancient hedgerow or

woodland may continue to support a small colony of these butterflies - even in our towns and cities.

The female butterfly carefully lays her eggs on the developing leaf buds. These buds will remain dormant and not open until the following spring when the caterpillar emerges from its egg to feed from within the lush fresh leaf buds. Armed with a long-hooked stick for pulling branches down to eye level, a hand-lens and good eyesight, the egg hunter begins his or her patient search. The perfect excuse for a Christmas Day walk!

Where to look

Nestled between the plump scaly leaf buds of an oak, we will find our prize. Measuring no more than 1.5mm in diameter and resembling an off-white spiny sea urchin, the egg of the Purple Hairstreak butterfly will remain here until early-March when the caterpillar emerges to feed.



Caterpillar feeding

Where to look

Nestled at the base of a leaf bud or on a leaf scar of English elm and wych elm, we will, usually after a great deal of searching, find our prize. Measuring no more than 1.5mm in diameter and resembling a grey-blue miniature flying saucer with a white frilly rim, the egg of the white-letter hairstreak butterfly will remain here until early-March when the caterpillar emerges.

2 WHITE-LETTER HAIRSTREAK

Since the 1970s, when Dutch Elm Disease reached Britain, the white-letter hairstreak has suffered dramatic declines in numbers and distribution. Today, many colonies survive on patches of remnant elm growing as suckering trees along hedgerows.

The adult butterflies are on the wing from late June to early August, during which time the females lay their eggs on the developing leaf buds which remain dormant until the following spring. To establish if a colony exists at a particular location, it is



White-letter hairstreak

often easier to conduct an egg search in mid-winter rather than look for an adult butterfly.



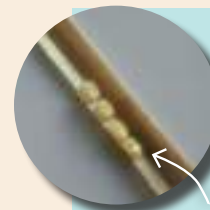
Essex skipper

3 ESSEX SKIPPER

Searching for Essex skipper eggs requires true dedication and is certainly not a pastime to be undertaken lightly.

The plump, sausage shaped eggs are pale creamy-white and are usually laid end- to-end within a dried grass sheath - making them completely invisible to the naked eye. These eggs are tough too and can survive prolonged immersion in water. The phrase 'searching for a needle in a haystack' certainly comes to mind for anyone considering a winter egg search for this species.

The best advice if you wish to find the eggs of an Essex skipper is to confine this activity to the summer months. Find a female Essex skipper plump with eggs in late July (check that she is not a small skipper as they are similar in appearance)



Where to look

As a grassland species, the female butterfly lays her eggs within sheaths of grass, particularly cock's-foot. It may also lay on common couch grass, creeping soft-grass, false brome, meadow foxtail, Timothy grass and tor-grass.

and follow her as she wanders among the grass. Wait for her to land on a grass stem and crawl up and down the stem searching for a gap into which she can insert her eggs within a sheath of grass.

WILD NEWS

All the latest regional and national news from The Wildlife Trusts

45,000

The total numbers of people who follow the Trust on our social media accounts, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



The rare white admiral butterfly has been recorded on Highgate Common

GARY PASCOE

REGIONAL

Rare insects to benefit from habitat link project

The Trust has been awarded £10,000 to undertake a habitat connectivity project to link Highgate Common with Kinver Edge in South Staffordshire.

Working with The National Trust and Natural England, the project will use the principles of Nature Recovery Networks to map opportunities to create and enhance habitats for invertebrates.

Highgate Common is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is managed by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. A remnant of ancient lowland heathland,

the reserve is home to an estimated 5,000 different insect species, many of which are extremely rare.

The National Trust owned and managed Kinver Edge is also known to support a wide range of scarce invertebrates in its mosaic of acidic and heathland habitats. The results of the project will be used to inform conservation work, such as the restoration of key habitat and working with landowners in the area to help them manage their land in an environmentally-sensitive way.

REGIONAL

Trust continues vaccinating after cull U-turn

The Trust is deeply disappointed that thousands of badgers will again be shot in this year's expanded cull despite the Government's promise to move away from lethal control. Our

badger vaccination programme continues across the county, and we are campaigning for the development of a cattle vaccine along with DEFRA-funded badger vaccination.

NEWS IN BRIEF

1 Cotton grass returns to Roaches fire site

We are pleased to share with you this photo of cotton grass growing back on land that was devastated by a wild fire on The Roaches near Leek two years ago. In August 2018, around 200 acres of precious moorland were destroyed by a blaze caused by a campfire. Since then, the Trust and volunteers have been working hard to restore the area and bring back wildlife. Gritstone dams and peat bunds in the ditch network have been created to hold back water, rewetting the blanket bog and helping it recover. A team of volunteers also planted thousands of sphagnum moss plugs last winter, to help rebuild the peatland bog.



2 Trust says 'cheers' to Peakstones Rock

We're raising a glass to the team at Peakstones Rock Brewing Co for raising another £300 for the Trust from the sales of their popular Peregrine Ale. The light-coloured beer is sold in pubs across the county and five pence from the sale of each pint goes to the Trust. Bottles of the tasty brew are also available from the Crossways Micropub in Blythe Bridge and Cheadle Bargain Booze. Pubs regularly stocking the ale include the Crossways Micropub, The Greyhound Inn, Burston, Dog & Partridge, Swinscote, Rose & Crown, Algreave and The Reform, Thorncliffe.

REGIONAL



PAUL HARRIS/2020 VISION

Green mentor to work with schools to help environment

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been awarded funding to provide young people in Staffordshire the opportunity to get involved with environmental projects that will benefit their school and the local community.

The funding supports the employment of a 'Green Mentor' to go into schools and work with young people to facilitate their work on a chosen environmental project. Example projects could include tackling litter problems in the area, minimising use of single use plastics or improving the school environment for wildlife.

The Ernest Cook Trust offers children and young people, their families and communities, the chance to learn from the land through hands-on outdoor learning activities. The Green Influencers Scheme

was set up by The Ernest Cook Trust and is match funded with the #iwill Fund. The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) are each investing £25 million seed funding to create the #iwill Fund. The Ernest Cook Trust is acting as a match funder and awarding grants on behalf of the #iwill Fund.

The Ernest Cook Trust Green Influencers Scheme is being rolled out across England. Paget High School in Burton on Trent and Ormiston Horizon Academy in Stoke on Trent are due to begin working with the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust's Green Mentor in November. The aim is for the Green Mentor to work with 16 schools across Staffordshire over the course of the next two and a half years.

REGIONAL

Fight for wildlife continues as HS2 progresses

The Trust's Senior Planning Officer, Kate Dewey, presented evidence to the HS2 Lords Select Committee about the devastating impact of the line on Local Wildlife Sites and irreplaceable habitats in Staffordshire.

Kate provided detailed information on the risks posed to many local sites, and expressed concern that many important wildlife habitats, including wetlands and ancient hedgerows along the route, had not been recognised properly by HS2.

She said: "HS2 have not identified any other irreplaceable habitats on the Phase 2a route

other than ancient woodland and veteran trees. There are many other habitats that are very hard to replace, such as inland saltmarsh and lowland fen, and we think these should also be recognised."

The Trust is continuing to monitor the construction work on the line and record the destruction of some of Staffordshire's most significant ancient woodlands.

Concerns were again raised after work to clear Little Lynton Woods and Fulfen Woods, near Lichfield, started early, despite assurances from HS2.

Together we're stronger

Here are some of the ways your membership has been helping to protect your local wildlife

4,168

children have taken part in the Trust's online and face-to-face events since July, bringing them closer to the natural world

1,200

critically-endangered white-clawed crayfish have been moved to a safer 'ark site', to protect them from the deadly crayfish plague



40

records of hedgehog sightings sent in to Staffordshire Ecological Record since July

500

metres of river restored at Cherry Holme, in East Staffordshire, as part of a Transforming the Trent Valley partnership project to reinstate a river island for wildlife

Stag beetles are one of many species in danger.

UK UPDATE

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

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

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

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

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

recovery for nature and help us reach 30%.

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

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

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

Support our campaign today to bring our wildlife back:

wildlifetrusts.org/30-30-30

THE CHANGES WE NEED

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

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

UK UPDATE

New ambassadors for nature

Award-winning actor Alison Steadman, Bradford-based GP and TV presenter Dr Amir Khan, presenter and filmmaker Hannah Stitfall, science communicator Sophie Pavelle and Iceland managing director Richard Walker

are taking up the new role of Ambassadors for The Wildlife Trusts. The nature enthusiasts will use their voices, influence and audiences to help us raise awareness of the urgent need for

nature's recovery, and encourage more people to take action.

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

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



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



Safer areas at sea

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

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

wtru.st/help-our-seas

UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 Hip hip hoor-hay!

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

2 Crane comeback

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



3 Duke's reprieve

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



We bet you didn't know...

This rare pink ballerina waxcap was discovered on grassland in Stone by a member of Trust staff while working on a natural flood management project. What a beauty!

REGIONAL



Trust's work gets national profile on BBC Countryfile

Presenters Matt Baker and Marguerita Taylor reported on the Trust's project to re-route the River Trent through Stoke City FC's former stadium, the Victoria Ground,

in an episode focusing on Stoke-on-Trent in September. Matt also got stuck into some family nature activities in a Wildlings session at Hem Heath Woods in Trentham.

REGIONAL

9 out of 10 surveyed say nature important to their wellbeing

The Trust would like to thank all those who completed our Green Recovery survey. People across Staffordshire were asked to shape our vision for a Green Recovery by giving their thoughts on what they would like a wilder Staffordshire to look like and how it can be achieved.

Almost 600 people took part – a great response which will give us vital data to help shape that future.

Questions included 'what is your favourite wild place in the county', 'how do you engage with nature' and 'what green spaces do you think need improving where you live.'

The Trust's work across the county, including its partnership project work, showcase how investment in nature can bring wildlife back as well as have positive

impacts on people and the local landscape. It is clear from the answers how passionate people are about wildlife and wild places across all corners of Staffordshire.

Some of the initial results show:

- Over three quarters of those who answered say they have noticed nature more since lockdown
- 98 per cent of people said nature is important to their wellbeing
- 96 per cent of people said nature's recovery is important to them
- 94 per cent of people said new and improved laws need to be put in place to protect wildlife

We'll now be collating all the answers and putting them together for a report to present at a Green Recovery summit.

In numbers

31

The number of planning consultations and sites that the Trust's senior planning officer, Kate Dewey, has worked on since July. Kate's work is funded by your membership, and means we can champion the needs of wildlife within the planning system. Kate has also given evidence to the HS2 Phase 2a Lords Select Committee, and contributed to a Local Wildlife Sites management plan on HS2 Phase 1, M6-M54 link and three quarry sites. Find out more: staffs-wildlife.org.uk/what-we-do/planning-advice



1

A colourful new wasp was discovered for the first time at the Trust's Highgate Common reserve, near Wombourne, by dedicated volunteer Mick Hayhurst over summer. Warden Gary Pascoe identified the attractive insect as a female *Hedychrum nobile*, a type of cuckoo wasp. This was verified by Andy Jukes, entomologist and lifelong friend of Highgate Common. The species searches for the nest of a host wasp, enters the nest and lays eggs. Later the eggs hatch and the grubs of the cuckoo wasp eat the eggs/larvae of the host, and sometimes the food store too. A newcomer to the UK, the species was first recorded in Bedfordshire in 2012.

REGIONAL



A settlement pool created as part of Natural Flood Management work the Scotch Brook catchment near Stone

Project will tackle flooding and improve wild habitats

Funding has been awarded to carry out a series of projects to improve water quality, reduce flood risk and enhance wildlife habitats along watercourses in the Stafford area.

The Trust has received a grant of £55,000 from the Environment Agency to implement Natural Flood Management (NFM) techniques in the Upper Sow catchment.

The funding comes just over a year after Stafford experienced severe flooding, which caused major disruption to residents and local businesses.

The work carried out will protect, restore and emulate the natural regulating

function within the river catchment, boosting biodiversity and reducing the height of floodwaters.

All of the watercourses being targeted in the scheme are failing to meet 'Good' status under the Water Framework Directive. The reasons for failure are attributed to diffuse pollution from agriculture, due to poor livestock management, and water company sewage discharges.

The techniques employed will address these issues, for example by preventing livestock from entering watercourses and creating new pools, channels and wetland features to help improve water quality.

REGIONAL

Art lovers wild about virtual exhibition

More than 500 people visited a nature-inspired digital art exhibition on the Trust's family Facebook page.

The WildArt exhibition was organised as an alternative to 2020's WildChild Festival, which could not go ahead this year because of coronavirus restrictions.

Funded by the Arts Council, artworks were created through collaborations with artists and young people in Staffordshire. Exhibits



included giant sculptures inspired by children's wildlife drawings and flags designed by a Beaver group in Newcastle.

See the artworks at: www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/WildChildFestivalblog

LOCAL GROUP NEWS

Leek Group

Although the Meerbrook plant sale was cancelled, our secretary Val managed to sell £1,135 worth of plants already prepared for the sale. These funds were added to the Gun Moor acquisition fund, in addition to which a very generous donation of £4,000 was received from a family member who had to forgo their annual holiday due to the coronavirus crisis. The Gun Moor fund raised by Leek Group now stands at £10,234.13. In August Val and John spent a couple of days counting and mapping the Autumn gentians at Thorswood *pictured below*. 309 plants were found at over 21 locations, providing a basis for the Trust to monitor their future status. Both Rod Wood and Swineholes monthly workparties have restarted, strictly working under coronavirus regulations. Three special workparties have also been held at Brund Hill (The Roaches) to promote the young woodland trees.

John Stanney



South Staffordshire Group

We have, unfortunately, had to cancel all indoor meetings and walks for the 2020/21 season, which runs from September 2020 to May 2021. All of the speakers have been notified and asked to return in the same month of the following year. Most have already accepted. This decision followed lengthy discussions with the staff in charge of the venue and it was agreed that it would be impossible to hold meetings and maintain social distancing.

On a happier note, we were pleased that the Wildlife Trust has opened a charity shop in Codsall and we wish this venture every success.

Fred Davies

Carbon zero heroes

Editor Liz Peck looks at the role that healthy natural habitats can play in tackling climate change

Restoring peatland habitats, such as Craddocks Moss, will increase their carbon-capturing ability and benefit wildlife

The role of trees and woodlands in absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere – and playing a vital part in tackling climate change – is well known. But did you know that other natural habitats, such as peatlands and grasslands can also act as very effective carbon sinks too?

Carbon sequestration is the process by which carbon dioxide – the greenhouse gas which traps heat and causes the Earth's surface to warm up – is removed from the atmosphere and stored in solid or dissolved forms in the terrestrial environment (ie. In vegetation, soils and sediments), the ocean and in rock formations.

Carbon is transferred naturally from the atmosphere by plants through photosynthesis. The leaves of the plant absorb CO₂ and form it into sugar, starch and other organic compounds. As a result of this process, the carbon is stored above ground as plant material, or 'biomass', and below ground within the soil in the plant's root systems. Decaying and decomposing plant matter, which is processed by the creatures within the soil and transformed into humus, is also a carbon store that improves the fertility and water-holding capacity of the soil. Globally, soils contain more carbon than is stored in plants and the atmosphere combined.

Carbon naturally moves, or cycles, between the atmosphere and vegetation, soils, and

the oceans, and prior to the Industrial Revolution, natural processes maintained a near balance between the two. However, since the 1800s, human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels for industry and transportation, have upset that balance. The most recent (2019) calculations of UK net emissions of carbon dioxide were provisionally estimated to be 354 million tonnes.

To drive this down, and for the Government to meet its target of net zero emissions by 2050, a combination of approaches will be

Despite being such an effective carbon store, the role of peatlands in fighting climate change is often overlooked, leading to them being branded the 'cinderella habitat'.

required, to both reduce emissions and increase sequestration.

The way that we manage our land can play a pivotal role in helping to store more carbon. Healthy ecosystems on land and at sea can absorb vast quantities of CO₂ from the atmosphere and lock it away. Evidence suggests that restoring our natural systems could provide over one third of the CO₂ mitigation needed by 2030 to meet the Paris Agreement.

PEATLANDS

Peatlands are the world's largest natural terrestrial carbon store, sequestering 0.37 gigatonnes of CO₂ a year. Peatlands cover nearly 10 per cent of the UK's land area and store an estimated 3.2 billion tonnes of carbon.

Peatlands are a type of wetland. The bog plants and sphagnum mosses that grow in these waterlogged, acidic conditions only partially decompose, and peat soil is formed from layers and layers of

this material. A lack of oxygen means the plants do not rot completely, and therefore the carbon within them is trapped in perpetuity in peatland soil.

Despite being such an effective carbon store, the role of peatlands in fighting climate change is often overlooked, leading to them being branded the 'cinderella habitat'.

It is estimated that 80 per cent of the UK's peatland soils are heavily degraded,

either through drainage or burning. When damaged, peatlands turn from a carbon store into a carbon source. In the UK, degraded peatlands release the equivalent of 23 million tonnes of CO₂ every year - equal to the average emissions of about 660,000 UK households.

A study undertaken by the Moors for the Future Partnership earlier this year concluded that the wildfire on The Roaches in 2018 resulted in 11,431 tonnes of CO₂ being released into the atmosphere. Since the fire, the Trust has been working to restore the peatland by rewetting it. Rewetting damaged peatlands, to restore their carbon-capturing abilities, should be a national priority in mitigating against climate change.

GRASSLANDS

UK grasslands store 2 billion tonnes of carbon. How a grassland is managed affects how much carbon is stored in the soil below. The application of fertilisers, frequency of grazing, amount of disturbance and diversity of plant species all contribute to sequestration rates, with more intensively managed grasslands storing less carbon. In the UK, an alarming 97 per cent of semi-natural grasslands have been lost since the 1930s, and between 1990-2006, arable conversion of grasslands released 14 million tonnes of CO₂. Supporting farmers in managing grasslands in more environmentally-sensitive ways, and restoring species-rich grasslands, is an effective way of both locking up carbon and boosting biodiversity.



The wildfire on The Roaches resulted in more than 11,000 tonnes of CO₂ being released into the atmosphere

WOODLANDS

About 1 billion tonnes of carbon are locked up in UK woodlands, in both trees themselves and in the soils. The amount of carbon uptake varies between tree species. The fast-growing sitka spruce, which is currently grown in around half of all commercial forestry plantations, performs highly in capturing carbon. However, compared to native broadleaf trees, it offers a significantly less valuable wildlife habitat. In November last year, the Government announced a £50 million Woodland Carbon Guarantee scheme to encourage landowners to plant trees. While this news is of course welcome, it is worth bearing in mind that the location of any new tree-planting schemes needs to be carefully considered.

Planting new trees into established, species-rich grassland for example, can be counter-productive because carbon is released when soil is disturbed, and as the young trees become established they can shade out the grassland plants beneath them. New woodlands, if carefully planned to maximise benefits and avoid harming other habitats, can help address the twin crises of climate change and the catastrophic decline in wild species in the UK.



Planting new woodlands is an important way of locking up carbon, but must be carefully planned in order to maximise the benefits for wildlife too

ROSS HODDINOTT/2020.VISION



3 actions you can take to help fight climate change.

Go peat-free

Next time you buy a bag of compost, make sure it's peat-free. The peat in garden compost is dug out of wild places, damaging some of the last remaining peatlands in places like Eastern Europe. As well as destroying precious wild habitat, this process releases carbon into the atmosphere, accelerating climate change.



Shrink your footprint

Investigate your carbon footprint and take steps to reduce it. Perhaps you can swap some car journeys and walk instead, switch to a green energy supplier or make a pledge to reduce food miles when you shop.

Donate to our appeal

Make a donation to our Craddocks Moss appeal, to restore a precious carbon-capturing lowland peat bog to the west of Stoke-on-Trent. Details on p25.



Hurry!
Limited
stock
available

Give a gift to wildlife this Christmas: buy your Christmas cards from the Trust



Robin and
bluetit, mixed
pack
120mm x 120mm
10 cards, five each
of two designs.
£3.99



Long-tailed tit in
snowfall
153mm x 153mm
8 cards
£4.99

Order online at www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/christmascards

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust Limited Notice of 50th Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the fiftieth Annual General Meeting of Staffordshire Wildlife Trust Limited will be held via videoconference on Monday 7th December 2020, commencing at 12 noon for the following purposes:

Ordinary business

- 1) Highlights of 2020 presentation.
- 2) To receive and agree the minutes of the 49th AGM.
- 3) To receive the Chairman's Report for the year ended 31st December 2019.
- 4) To receive and approve the Report of the Board and Audited Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2019.
- 5) To appoint Baldwins Audit Services Limited as auditors and to authorise the Board to fix their remuneration.
- 6) To re-elect/elect up to 2 Members of the Board. In accordance with Article 27 of the Articles of Association, any member in post for 4 years will retire and may be re-elected, and any member appointed during the year will retire and may be elected. The names of such Members of the Board seeking re-election/election, duly nominated and seconded, will be presented at the meeting. Other nominations for election to the Board duly proposed and seconded and with the written agreement of the proposed nominee shall be in the hands of the Secretary not less than 14 clear days before the date of the Annual General Meeting.
- 7) Any other business notified to the Secretary at the Wolsley Centre, Wolsley Bridge by Friday 20th November 2020.

If you wish to attend the AGM please provide your name, address, membership number & email address to c.gamble@staffs-wildlife.org.uk by Friday 27th November 2020 and you will be sent the appropriate papers, joining instructions for the videoconference call and details of voting procedures.

By Order of the Board
Paul Hackney
(Hon. Secretary)
November 2020

The Wolsley Centre
Wolsley Bridge
Stafford
ST17 0WT

APPOINTMENT OF PROXIES

Any member having voting rights and not able to attend the meeting may appoint another person (who need not be a member or a member with voting rights) as a proxy to attend the meeting and to speak and vote in place of the absent member. The instrument appointing the proxy must be lodged with the Trust at its Registered Office, The Wolsley Centre, Wolsley Bridge, Stafford, ST17 0WT not less than 48 hours before the time of the meeting.

The instrument of proxy should be worded thus: 'I (insert full name and membership number) of (insert full address) being a member of Staffordshire Wildlife Trust Limited hereby appoint (the Chairman of the meeting) or (insert full name, address and email address of proxy) (delete as appropriate) as my proxy to attend and to speak and vote on my behalf at the Annual General Meeting of Staffordshire Wildlife Trust Limited to be held on Monday 7th December 2020 via videoconference and at any adjournment thereof (insert any instructions to the proxy as to voting). (Signed and dated by member.)'

FOCUS ON...

Our new reserve appeal

Thank you

to everyone who has donated to our appeal so far. Your support is very much appreciated!

Help us save Craddocks Moss



ILLUSTRATION BY NAT ELLIS

Kickstarting nature's recovery

We are embarking on our most ambitious goal ever, to put nature back into recovery across the county. This is part of a national movement, #30by30, which is aiming to give 30% of the UK's land and water back to nature by 2030. To kick start this mission, we are hoping to raise £75,000 to purchase Craddocks Moss.

What's special about Craddocks Moss?

Nestled to the west of Stoke-on-Trent, Craddocks Moss is a unique lowland raised bog. After years of neglect and surrounding habitat loss, the delicate

balance of nature was damaged, and few species survived on this overgrown site. However, recent on-site recovery work has restored this land and it is thriving once again. Craddocks Moss is now a haven for rare plants like sphagnum mosses and cottongrass; and invertebrates like the four spotted-chaser dragonfly are making a cautious return. We are sure, that under our care, more wildlife could return to this diverse habitat.

What we want to achieve

Our vision for Craddocks Moss is for it to become an oasis for threatened wildlife, attracting endangered and long-absent species such as the water vole, and the insect-eating sundew plant; birds such as willow tit and curlew; the rare bog bush cricket; the white faced darter dragonfly; and the pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly. And perhaps most excitingly of all, we think Craddocks Moss could be the perfect location for reintroducing beavers to the county!

Save today, protect tomorrow

Purchasing Craddocks Moss will help the Trust in its aim to achieve a Nature

Recovery Network across Staffordshire. We need a Nature Recovery Network because many wild spaces are isolated, and our mission is to bridge these green gaps through natural wilding. By forming a network of safe havens across Staffordshire, like Craddocks Moss, we can restore nature's freedom to find new territory, and we'll help all our wildlife to flourish as well as bringing nature closer to people.

How you can help

With your help we can buy Craddocks Moss and restore this precious habitat for threatened wildlife while supporting our nature recovery mission. There are three simple ways you can donate:

BY POST: Send a cheque payable to 'Staffordshire Wildlife Trust Ltd to FREEPOST WILDLIFE

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Craddocks Moss could be the perfect location for reintroducing beavers

NICK UPTON/CORNWALL WILDLIFE TRUST

LANDSCAPE PROJECTS NEWS

TRANSFORMING THE TRENT VALLEY (TTTV)

Natural river island restored for wildlife

Living Floodplains Officer Melanie Sanders reports on work to reinstate historic natural features on the Trent

Throughout September, contractors working on behalf of Staffordshire Wildlife Trust as part of the Transforming the Trent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme have been working on an ambitious river restoration project; one of the largest river island reinstatement projects so far in the UK.

The restoration works will reinstate a seven-hectare river island by restoring a palaeochannel* to the west of the River Trent at Cherry Holme, located between Catton Estate and Barton Quarry.

The main aim of the project is to create and diversify habitat along the River Trent both in the channel and on the island itself. The new channel will include features which would be present along a natural channel but are largely missing on the River Trent due to a history of dredging, straightening and over management. These features include deeper pools and shallower, faster-flowing riffles which are essential habitats for fish, invertebrates, and plants.

Riffles are particularly important for species of invertebrate such as caddisfly, stonefly and mayfly that can cling onto the channel bed cobbles to feed on algae and other plant material, whilst also using the cobbles to hide under. Elsewhere, pools will provide deeper, slower flowing areas of water, providing a refuge for fish including the critically endangered European eel, who are able to shelter from predators. The slower flow also means that organic matter can settle at the bottom of these pools creating a great food source.

Other features incorporated into the new channel include woody debris, bars and backwaters where vegetation will be able to establish creating many microhabitats. A channel like this can support a large range of aquatic species and will make for a much healthier and balanced ecosystem. It will also improve connectivity to the river island itself, helping to increase

The channel features will be created using gravels and cobbles kindly donated by Hanson Aggregates Ltd. The excavated soil from the newly formed channel will be used to create approximately 0.6 ha of reed bed habitat in an adjacent lake.



Above: A view of the Cherry Holme site showing the existing restored paleochannel and route of the new channel that will re-join the River Trent. **Left:** During the excavation works - the new channel is now visible.



the area of wet woodland on the island; a UK priority habitat, much of which has been lost over the last century.

Aside from the biodiversity benefits, the new channel will help to alleviate flooding by reducing pressure on Catton Hall and the surrounding land.

*a palaeochannel is a remnant of a once active river channel which has become disconnected from the main river and has been buried by sediment

Transforming the Trent Valley and Staffordshire Wildlife Trust would like to thank our partners and funders EDRF (European Regional Development Fund), Hanson Aggregates Ltd, Tarmac, Siemens Mobility on behalf of Network Rail and the Catton Estate for their contribution to the project.



LANDSCAPE PROJECTS **NEWS**

SUNRISE (STOKE AND URBAN NEWCASTLE)

River Trent follows new natural course in Stoke



NICK MOTT

Project Manager Richard Guy reports on the latest developments from the ERDF SUNRISE project.

Work has been completed on the creation of a huge new river channel in the heart of Stoke-on-Trent. Under the ERDF SUNRISE project, the Trust led the construction of the new route - which involved the excavation of 40,000 tonnes of earth - to create a gently meandering course winding through the site of Stoke City FC's former Victoria Ground. The new 500-metre river channel will vastly improve this stretch of the Trent for wildlife, offering spawning areas for brown trout, a migration corridor for otters and hunting opportunities for kingfishers. Natural materials including several thousands of tonnes of gravel and huge tree trunks taken from the site have also been added to the

new channel. Local residents will also be able to enjoy an attractive nature walk following the construction of a riverside footpath during phase 2 of the site's development. The new channel replaces an ugly concrete channel that has carried the Trent through this part of the city since the turn of the century. To celebrate the completion of the project, the Trust hosted a virtual opening ceremony. Keynote speakers included Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trusts, Craig Bennett and Stoke-on-Trent City Council leader Abi Brown. Attendees also took part in a mass virtual 'ribbon-cutting' led by Stoke Central MP Jo Gideon.



Left: Participants at the virtual opening ceremony take part in a joint ribbon cutting to celebrate the completion of the new river channel.

NEWS UPDATES



RICHARD GUY

River being restored on university campus

Work is progressing well on an ambitious project to bring nature back to a stretch of river running through Staffordshire University's campus in Stoke-on-Trent. A 400m section of the River Trent, which currently flows through an artificially-engineered straight channel, will follow a more natural path after the completion of landscaping works. The scheme is being delivered by the Trust with support from the Wild Trout Trust and the Environment Agency. The new channel will include a series of meanders, gently sloping river banks and importantly, the addition of gravel, which could provide spawning sites for brown trout. The project will also see the creation of several small backwater pools along the river's edge, which will provide a haven for aquatic insects such as dragonflies and damselflies.

The SUNRISE project is funded by ERDF (European Regional Development Fund). The project partners are Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Newcastle Borough Council, the Wild Trout Trust and Groundwork West Midlands.



What's in a name?

Words have the power to change the way we view the world. Author **Horatio Clare** explores the connection between language and nature.

Recently a family passed my house, which overlooks a meadow near Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire. 'Look!' said the mother, 'A peacock!' 'It's a pheasant mum,' her teenaged daughter replied. 'It's a peacock,' repeated the mother, looking hard at the cock pheasant. It was a joyful exchange to witness. Is this not how we all begin with nature, with anything — naming and misnaming, feeling our way towards understanding?

There must have been a great deal of new naming of nature, recently. On a visit to Scotland, our seven-year-old named what might well have been a buzzard a golden eagle. He still confuses carrion crows and jackdaws, but like many of us this year, he is making a start, delighted with collective nouns for the unkindness of ravens we see occasionally, the exaltations of larks on our moors and the murder of crows that patrol the valley.

For months now, teenagers, students and family groups have been appearing in the local woods and fields, absorbing their calm, beauty and perspective.

Nature has been vital to us, this hard and awful year; there seems real hope that the change we have been praying for is afoot: with any luck, renewed relationships with nature and language are being born. Sales of field guides are up, according to Emma Corfield-

Walters who runs Bookish in Crickhowell. Emma has been running a mail-order service throughout the pandemic: 'I'm selling a lot of foraging and identification books, so people are taking this time to learn,' she says.

The depth and richness of all there is to learn will strike the readers of these books the way those of us who love fauna and flora were struck when our passions began. The multitudes of dialects and the varieties of ancient languages of which modern English is comprised speak of an extraordinary cultural and historical relationship between the inhabitants of our isles and the glittering diversity of species they have been home to — and will, with luck, support again.

The precise nature of that relationship is found in our vernacular and demotic terms for animals and birds: humour, close observation, accuracy and a poetic sense of the country characterise these terms, a cornucopia of words for everything from moles to herons. It makes sense that the creatures we see most often have the most names. The humble woodlouse is a peabug or a nutbug in Liverpool, a ticktock in Bedfordshire, a flump in Southampton, a parson pig on the Isle of Man, a sow-pig in Norfolk and a billybutton in Yorkshire.

Shakespearean England is alive in our local names for species, with the great dukedoms and earldoms of Cornwall, Norfolk, and Yorkshire reliably providing their own takes on the world. When Hamlet announces he knows a hawk from a handsaw he is using East Anglian dialect: a handsaw or hanser is a grey heron on the Broads. If the traditional English summer involves standing heron-still at a window watching water falling from the sky, the national thesaurus has every kind covered, from mizzle in





Our language is full of magical words for wildlife, like 'ammil' for the fiery light of sun on hoar frost

JAY © PETER CAIRNS/2020VISION, SUN ON HOAR FROST © GUY EDWARDES/2020VISION

Devon, to picking in Wales, smirr in Scotland (fine, drifting rain), letty in Somerset (the kind of rain that is a let or hindrance to working outside); the heavier stuff is plothing in the Midlands and the northeast, stoating in Scotland (rain so hard it bounces off the ground) and 'raining forks 'tiyunsdowndards' in Lincolnshire: raining pitchforks.

Many of these terms have fallen out of general use; they form a corps of specialised knowledge, retained in the vocabularies of older people, and in little-read books. There have been efforts to collect and revive them, notably by Robert Macfarlane in Landmarks, which assembled a trove of glossaries of dialect words for landscapes and nature. It delights in terms like 'zwer', an Exmoor word describing 'the whizzing noise made by a covey of partridges as they break suddenly from cover', and 'summer geese' (steam rising in

sunlight from a wet Yorkshire moor). Reading it, I resolved to remember and use the lovely

Devonian word 'ammil' — the

fiery light produced by sun on hoar frost. To have a new name for a thing is to have sharper and brighter eyes, to have your internal and external worlds enriched (Macfarlane himself loves 'smeuse', a word for a gap in a hedge made by the repeated passage of small animals).

Try as one might, though, without

a community of people who also need and use these words, they remain idiosyncratic and obscure, and the objects and effects to which they refer remain marginal or unconsidered. We can still teach them to each other and our children — who could not love the Yorkshire 'mowdiwarp' for a mole? — but language is an organic, natural force. Apart from the revival of Welsh, the result of huge effort and investment, there are few examples of any tongue or dialect being brought back to prosperity from impoverishment.

In 2017, Robert Macfarlane and the artist Jackie

30% of 8-to-11-year-olds cannot identify a magpie, but 90% of them can spot a Dalek

Morris had a mighty success with *The Lost Words*, a book of poems and pictures featuring wrens, bluebells, kingfishers and acorns, designed to reverse a disconnection between children and nature which came to light with the removal of these words from the Oxford Junior Dictionary. Although the passionate response to the book proves that parents and children still mind about these things, the territory which the book describes, with its collection of formerly numerous birds and common trees, reflects a terrifying decline in wild species, and a concomitant retreat in human interest and understanding of them. What



■ The Welsh name for the jay is *sgrech y coed*, which broadly translates as 'screecher of the woods'. A fitting name for this forest-dwelling cousin of the crow, so often heard before it's seen.

■ In Scots, the mountain hare has been known by many names including *whiddie baudrons*, *fuddie*, *maukin*, *cuttie*, and *lang lugs* — a reference to its large ears.

■ The eider, a sturdy sea duck, is known as the *Cuddy duck* in Northumberland. *Cuddy* is short for *Saint Cuthbert*, a seventh-century monk that lived on the *Farne Islands* and bestowed his protection on the eiders that nested there.



A recent survey has revealed at least 250 names for the woodlouse

chance does ammil have, if, as one recent survey found, 30 percent of eight-to-eleven-year-olds cannot identify a magpie, but 90 percent of them can spot a Dalek?

Instead of the miracle it would have taken to fix our disconnection from nature, there came the terrible affliction of coronavirus. But the effect may be the same. As traffic decreased, towns and cities fell silent and millions of us worked from home, we began to repair relationships with place, the local and with time that have been broken for decades. I thought I knew this valley in Yorkshire, but it took lockdown for me to really see it.

Day by day, I watched the wrens nesting, the kestrel hunting, and that peacock-pheasant. He established his territory, then crowed and thrummed, broadcasting its potential, drawing in two hen pheasants, one of which then laid eggs, from which hatched chicks, over which the father crooned in a most beguiling manner until the day when they took their first flights, like large drunk bees.

Intrigued, I looked the bird up. 'Pheasant' comes from the Greek 'phasianos', meaning a bird from the land of the river Phasis, which is in present-day Armenia. Well I never! Instead of my diary's usual harried and time-hurrying checklist of events and journeys, commutes and re-schedulings, this year has been charted by the appearance of the first red admiral butterfly, the return of the swallows, the dive and drifts of flocks of swifts, the herons' daily journeys up and down the beck, the appearance of the bats and



Horatio Clare's award-winning books include *Running for the Hills*, *Down to the Sea in Ships* and *Aubrey and the Terrible Yoot*.

- In Northern Ireland you might hear a yellowhammer referred to as a yella yorlin, a meadow pipit called a moss-cheeper, a crane fly known as a granny-needle or a black ant as a pishmire.

Wildlife around the UK

the evensong of tawny owls.

Human time, which was post-industrial time, dictated by the clock and fought over by apps and notifications, seems to have slipped sideways towards something much more natural, seasonal and slower. In response, the internet has flooded with the thoughts and observations of people noticing birds and animals, remarking on the dawn chorus, and taking action.

Mary Colwell, a naturalist, author and producer of David Attenborough's programmes, has begun a campaign to introduce a GCSE in Natural History into the school syllabus. The campaign is attracting widespread support: if and when it is successful, our relationship with nature will have taken a crucial step forward. Coming generations will be able to see and name the world around them in the way many who went before them could not.

My words of the year have been 'essential' and 'inessential' — how much of our former lives was taken up with the latter, and what new and old things, and what new and old words, will the changed world decide it cannot do without?

Most wonderfully, it seems certain that one casualty of the coronavirus will be the pernicious capitalist cliché that time is money. There is going to be less money around, it seems certain, but more time. And time is not money: time is life, time is beauty, time is the one true currency we have to spend in this world.

We cannot hothouse a return of the terms and languages we once had for nature, but as we relearn how deeply we need the natural world, our words and phrases for it will return and grow anew. Peacock-pheasant for cock pheasant seems a fine place to start, at least in Hebden Bridge.



Wildlife featured regularly in Shakespeare's works, from hawks and herons to the 'Tu-whit; Tu-who' of tawny owls

A GCSE in Natural History could bring young people closer to nature. Discover more about the campaign to make this a reality.



wildlifetrusts.org/nature-gcse



A natural collaboration



The Trust is helping farmers to work together collaboratively to address environmental priorities on a landscape-scale. Editor Liz Peck reports.

Farmers manage over 70 per cent of land in the UK, and are therefore a fundamental part of the jigsaw as we work to stop the catastrophic decline of nature all around us.

Working collaboratively, farmers can have a significant impact on improving habitat for wildlife at a landscape-scale, as well as addressing other pressing issues such as flooding, water quality and climate change. To help achieve these goals, almost 100 'Farmer Facilitation Groups' are working across the country to address particular environmental priorities in different areas. Funded through DEFRA, the groups meet regularly throughout the year, giving members an opportunity to share knowledge, access advice and learn about different aspects of land management. They are landowner-led, with members agreeing together what activities would be beneficial to them and their local landscape.

Two of the groups that Staffordshire Wildlife Trust is involved in supporting are the Whiston Brook group and the South West Peak group, alongside the Peak District National Park Authority.

“The idea behind the group is to encourage landowners to think about their land differently and bring about positive change”

The Whiston Brook group's primary objectives are improving water quality in their catchment area – focusing particularly on preventing agricultural phosphates from entering the watercourse, which leads to a drop in oxygen levels and has major impacts on aquatic wildlife. Another ambition of the group is to help reduce flooding downstream by storing and holding back floodwaters.

The Trust's senior ecological project officer Anna Nixon, who is the group's facilitator, said: “The idea behind the group is to encourage landowners to think about their land differently and bring about positive change so that the land is managed in a more environmentally-friendly way. “Our programme has included training events and talks, so that the members can speak to experts in different areas.

We have also linked up with some of the local universities to learn about the latest research in farming, and had a workshop on microplastics in agriculture.”

The South West Peak Farmer's Group has 14 members, encompassing a land area of 2414 acres. The group's priorities include improving and linking wildlife habitats in this unique landscape area, as well as introducing natural flood management onto their land.

Senior conservation manager Jeff Sim, who leads the group alongside the Peak District National Park Authority, said: “Our training programme has included visiting the Yorkshire Dales National Park to meet farmers participating in a pilot project for wader habitat, drystone walling and talks on managing traditional hay meadows and moorlands.”



SOUTH WEST PEAK FARMERS' GROUP, BY TOM MARSHALL, PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY



Above: Rachel Busby, of Littyewood Farm, and below: John Stone, of Onecote Grange.



“The group enables conservation efforts in the area to be more joined up”

John Stone, who farms at Onecote Grange, a 390 acre dairy farm near Leek, is Chair of the South West Peak Group.

He said: “The purpose of our group is to bring together like-minded farmers and conservationists, to share knowledge on how we can manage our land to help wildlife whilst maintaining the farm on a profitable, commercial basis.

I've been interested in wildlife since I was about eight years old, and have always wanted to have areas on the farm where I can do my own thing and attract wildlife. I currently have 50 acres which are managed specifically for wildlife under the Higher Level Stewardship scheme. It is extremely diverse



botanically and there is a lot of birdlife too. We have 80 or 90 different wildflower species, including three different orchids, all of the hawkbits and St John's Worts and lots of different vetches including the rare bitter vetch.

We see a lot of birds here - many different raptors, grey herons and we even had a great white egret recently. The social aspect is really important. I feel like I am part of a community, working together to achieve something rather than a single farmer. It enables conservation efforts in the area to be more joined up. As a group, we are able to collectively advise and engage with different agencies. When we get together as a group we talk about lots of things, and we all have knowledge about our land and our experiences farming this landscape that we can share to help others. I've taken on board advice from others, such as when is the right time of year for rushcutting and when to graze. “Through the site visits and training we've had, I've also learned more about some of the species we are trying to help, which then feeds into how we manage the land. Understanding the challenges faced by wading birds and raptors for example, gives us an insight into how we can enhance the environment for them.”

“Being part of the group has changed the way we will be doing things on the farm”

Rachel Busby, of Littyewood Farm, a 200-hectare soft fruit farm in Bradley, is a member of the Whiston Brook Farmer's Group.

Rachel explained that being involved in the group has given her a greater understanding of the impacts of the farming practices employed on the farm. She said: “Local farmers and landowners in the Whiston Brook catchment were approached because the area had been identified as having high phosphate levels within watercourses in the catchment. The facilitation group was set up to enable farmers in this area to exchange ideas, work together, and access training and advice on how land can be managed in ways to benefit the environment. Engaging with the facilitation group has given us access to some expert advice. We have had soil and water assessments carried out on the farm by ADAS [an agricultural and environmental consultancy]. It provided us with a greater understanding of the impacts of our farming practices. Working as a collaborative group has been very beneficial for us. We meet regularly, usually once a month, and we get to speak to other farmers and landowners and share tips and ideas. As a result of being involved, we undertook a project to manage water runoff from our cherry polytunnels. We had some swales [shallow ditches] created. These help prevent water flowing from the polytunnels into the watercourse too quickly. They hold runoff water so any sediments fall out before entering the watercourse. Being part of the group has changed how we will be doing things in the future on the farm. At the moment we are looking into the possibility of introducing rainwater harvesting. Being a part of the Farmer Facilitation Group is also important to us as we supply some large retailers, and it is desirable for us to be able to demonstrate that we take our environmental responsibilities seriously.”

The Whiston Brook Catchment Group has nine members, covering an area of 2324 hectares.

Living on the hedge

BY ANDREW JAMIESON,
SURREY WILDLIFE TRUST

First light and an early winter mist lies softly over the fields. Along the track the low sun is backlighting frosted cobwebs and the frozen stalks of last summer's hogweed. Redwings and fieldfares, as well as our resident thrushes, take flight from the hedges as I approach. I have interrupted their gorging on a bounty of berries. Sloe, haw, hip and holly are all on the menu, these thorny thickets providing a rich larder for birds that have flocked from harsher climes to spend their winter with us.

Other birds take advantage of these hedges at this time of year, too. At sunset, hundreds of chattering starlings will take up their roosting stations deep within the intricate tangle of shrubs and climbers. Here they are protected from whatever the elements have in store over the long winter nights. Insects in various life stages are also holed-up. Some careful exploration and you may find dormant ladybirds tucked deep into bark crevices or the tiny eggs of the brown hairstreak butterfly lodged in the fork of a blackthorn branch. Meanwhile hidden away at ground level hedgehogs, toads, and newts are using the security of the dense vegetation for their seasonal slumber.

Later in the year our hedge will become a riot of colour, movement and aromatic scents with bees and butterflies visiting the flowers of campion, bramble and honeysuckle. Long-tailed tits, wrens and yellowhammers will be busily raising their broods; shrews and voles will be feeding, sheltering and defending their territories. But all that has yet to unfold, and for now much of life lies waiting.

Thousands of miles of hedgerows such as this criss-cross our country in a familiar and historical patchwork landscape. Rich in wildlife, this network of green highways links the habitats and populations of so many species, all living 'on the hedge'.

Farming on the hedge

Hedgerows are a vital part of the farming landscape, providing food and shelter to countless birds, mammals and insects. Bird food supplier and Wildlife Trust partner, Vine House Farm, provide a haven for tree sparrows and other wildlife in their hedges. Plus, with every purchase made supporting The Wildlife Trusts, the farm is helping wildlife beyond the farm gate. Find out more here:



wildlifetrusts.org/vine-house-farm



Brimstone

One of a handful of UK butterflies that overwinter as adults, tucked away in ivy. They can even be seen flying on sunny days in winter. The caterpillars feed on alder buckthorn.

Hedgehog

Hedgehogs will often choose the base of a thick hedgerow to site their hibernaculum to sleep away the colder months. In milder winters they may be seen out and about as late as December.

Stoat

These fierce predators are active all year round. They use hedge lines to hunt small rodents and rabbits, although when food is scarce may resort to foraging for earthworms.

Fieldfare

Winter visitors from the semi-arctic regions where they breed, these grey-blue thrushes will often arrive in mixed flocks along with redwings to feed on berries.

House sparrow

Both house sparrows and tree sparrows use dense hedges for roosting spots, protection from predators and even as nest sites when favoured holes and crevices aren't available.

Ivy

This late-flowering evergreen has much to offer wildlife in autumn and winter. Autumn nectar sustains bees, juicy berries feed birds long after other fruits have been snapped up, and dense foliage provides a home for hibernating bats and insects.

Dormouse

Well-managed hedgerows are vital corridors for many species and none more so than the dormouse. As well as a secure hibernation site, the hedge will provide them with many of the fruits, nuts and insects in their diet.

Orange ladybird

This distinctive ladybird is among the many insects that hibernate in leaf litter at the base of hedges. Other species of ladybird will be under bark or nestled within thick beds of lichen.



... to restored wetland!

From muddy field ...

Working with nature to protect communities from flooding

Natural Flood Management officer Kate Jones reports on how nature-based solutions can help tackle flooding.

The conservation world loves a good acronym, and one that you are likely to hear more and more is 'NFM'. It stands for Natural Flood Management and it is going to be a key tool in not only alleviating some of the effects of flooding, but also in making our landscape more climate resilient. NFM goes hand in hand with another acronym, Working with Natural Processes (WwNP). WwNP aims to protect, restore and emulate the natural functions of moorlands, floodplains, rivers and the coast. NFM falls within this and is specifically concerned with reducing the volume of water in a flood event and/or delaying the arrival of the flood peak in downstream areas. Our weather patterns are changing and we can switch rapidly from devastating floods to severe droughts and be left wondering where all that water went. After decades of building on floodplains, intensive agriculture and failing to see that our rivers are habitats just like an ancient wood or

meadow, our rivers are fighting back. Traditional ways of thinking had us straightening and deepening our rivers, removing all debris with the objective of getting the water off the land and on its way as quickly as possible. However, a deep channel carrying a lot of water has nowhere to go when it hits the culverts and pipes of a town or village sitting on a floodplain. We now need to think on a whole catchment scale and NFM has a crucial part to play. NFM works by increasing storage upstream, enabling water to be 'lost' through groundwater recharge or evaporation, increasing the complexity of the watercourse so that the water has more to 'chew' on, and it can be used tactically by using measures to desynchronise the peak flows from tributaries. The Trust is working with landowners to deliver a number of measures that will help to protect communities downstream. In this feature, we look at some of the techniques being employed.

Habitat creation and restoration

It's most likely that you have heard that planting trees is good for flood management, and this is certainly true. Trees enable water to penetrate the ground and so can increase the capacity of the land to hold water. The less lauded habitats are floodplain meadows and wetlands. Our rivers need to be reunited with their floodplains. An angry raging torrent in a deep trench is a lonely sight - releasing the river where we can enables it to reconnect with the floodplain and provide storage and habitat. Our wetland habitats have largely been lost due to drainage. Their capacity for storing and cleaning water, carbon sequestration and biodiversity is enormous. Large or small they're an effective measure.



Healthy soils

NFM starts even before water gets into the river, in fact as soon as it touches the ground as rain. Soil is the first line of defence, but large swathes of our landscape are not holding the line. Overgrazing, overuse and outright concreting over our soils is stopping them from absorbing water. Healthy soils are aerated with plenty of earthworms present and have good structure meaning they don't get washed away. Overgrazed land has been compacted to the point that there are no routes for water to get in and it runs straight over the surface. Soils that have been overused through years of ploughing and chemical treatment are loose and just wash away with the water down to the river. Changes in agricultural practices can have a marked impact on the ability of land to hold on to water; encouraging practices like cover crops on arable land means that soil erosion is reduced, whereas measures like sward slitting or lighter grazing on permanent grassland reduce compaction.



Storage pools

Storage pools have a number of benefits, the most obvious is simply storing water but they also allow sediment to drop out and provide wildlife habitat. Storage pools can be online or offline meaning they can be within the main watercourse or will be intercepting water before it reaches the watercourse. High loads of sediment in water can exacerbate

flooding by blocking culverts and making the clean-up job after a flood a lot harder, storage pools allow for water to be still for a time allowing sediment to drop out and settle on the bottom. They can be cleaned periodically as the sediment accumulates and reduces the capacity of the pool, the material can then be spread back onto farmland.

“Soil is the first line of defence, but large swathes of the landscape are not holding the line.”



Woody debris

Removing fallen trees and branches from rivers seems a logical thing to do, but actually a natural river would be full of timber which provides multiple benefits. Accumulations of woody debris act as 'leaky dams', holding back water whilst also aiding in filtering out contaminants. If these small leaky dams occur frequently along some of the smaller headwater streams and tributaries they actually store quite a lot of water and slow the flow.

Leaky dams also disrupt the flow of water and create new sediment pathways which adds diversity to the habitat of the river. The still backwaters created behind the accumulations provide resting spots for fish, and muddy bottoms create homes for a number of invertebrates. The riffles created by branches scour the riverbed, leaving clean pebble beds for spawning fish. Trees in rivers provide valuable cover, resting spots for fish, and are important for the life cycles of many invertebrates.

Fencing and stock barriers



Something as simple as fencing can make a huge difference to our watercourses. Although it is nice to see livestock around rivers, they can actually cause a lot of damage. Overgrazing the edges can destabilise the banks and cause erosion, and livestock standing and excreting in the water adds a lot of sediment as well as nutrients and contaminants. Fencing off a riparian strip means that vegetation can recover and hold the bank together, this also provides cover and habitat for many species.

Big gains in small spaces

A garden that might seem small to us can be a huge space for wildlife. **Kate Bradbury** reveals how you can optimise your space for wildlife.

Home sweet home

You don't need a large garden to hang a bee hotel, only a wall or fence. Erect bird boxes in the eaves for sparrows or swifts, or place a tit box 1-2m from the ground.

Layer bulbs in pot

Layer alliums and crocus in the same pot. Crocuses flower in March, then the alliums will grow and the crocuses die down, creating food for bees for longer in the same pot.

Grow climbing plants

Clothe every inch of your space with plants to provide shelter for insects. You might find night-flying moths resting here during the day!

Feed the birds

Hanging feeders of sunflower hearts, mixed seed and fat balls can save the lives of birds in winter and also help in the breeding season.

Wildlife gardening needn't just be for those with large gardens. Any space, no matter how small, can be used to create habitats for wildlife. Put together, our gardens take up more land than all of our nature reserves combined. So you might not think your garden has much potential as a wildlife habitat, but taken as part of a much wider network of linked spaces, yours could be one small but vital piece in a vast jigsaw of connected habitats.

Small spaces add up for wildlife because they contribute to 'wildlife corridors', which enable wildlife to travel, often between other habitats. You might have a small garden close to a park. By digging holes beneath your fences on either side you will be creating a corridor for hedgehogs to reach the park, potentially opening up huge new spaces for them (especially if your neighbours do the same). You might grow a few flowering plants on a balcony. These could provide a stepping stone of nectar, enabling butterflies and other insects to travel greater distances in search of a mate. These

corridors are important because they enable wildlife to increase their populations and adapt more easily to climate change. Some species are already shifting in a northerly direction — if there are no corridors or stepping stones to help them on their way, they'll have less chance of surviving.

You can tailor your garden to meet your needs as much as those of wildlife. No room for a pond? Try a little container pond, instead. Worried trees will grow too big for your space? Consider shrubs such as hazel, guelder rose and spindle. You can grow plants that flower over a long period to provide as much nectar and pollen as possible, such as perennial wallflower, catmint and salvias. Even just letting the grass grow in one patch. Anything you do will make a difference.

Gardens of all sizes can help save our struggling insects. Get a free guide to helping insects at home:

 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.

Add water

Container ponds and birdbaths are great for bringing wildlife into small spaces.

Wild highways

Hedges shelter wildlife and offer access to your garden, but if you have fences, a hole in, or beneath, them on either side provides a lifeline to mammals and amphibians.

Grow caterpillar food plants

Even small gardens have room for a few caterpillar foodplants. Try foxglove, primrose, hops, honeysuckle and red campion, or nettles in larger spaces.

Let long grass grow

Even the smallest patch of long grass will provide shelter and food for a range of species. You should get wildflowers popping up, too.

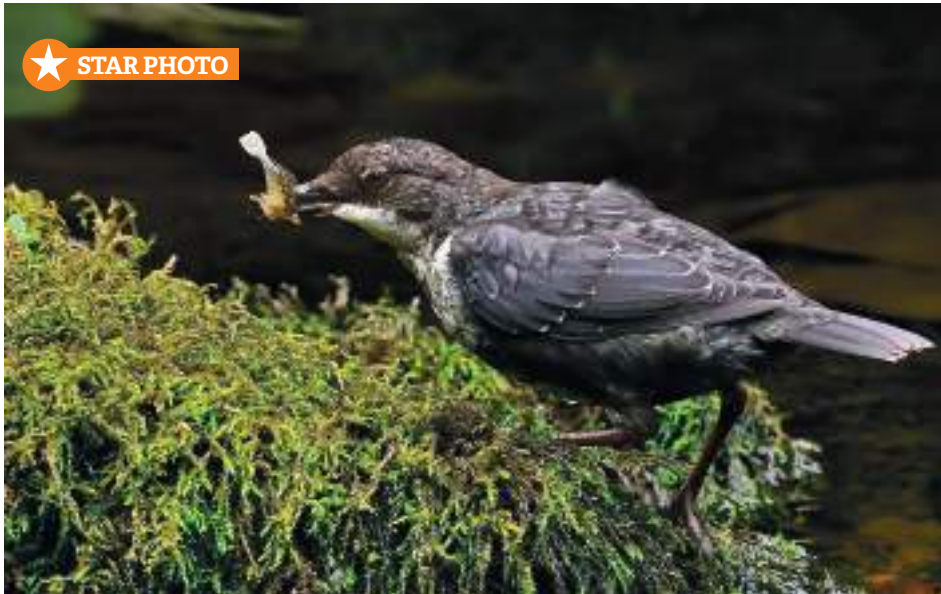


Send us
your snaps!

The winner of our star
photo will receive a £15
voucher to spend in The
Wolseley Centre.

YOUR PHOTOS

We'd love to see your photos! Please send them to l.peck@staffs-wildlife.org.uk



★ STAR PHOTO

What a catch!

Rob Bendelow, from near Lichfield, snapped this juvenile dipper on the River Dove in Wolfscote Dale, near Alstonefield. Rob said: "We stayed still and quiet on the bank and got good views. I was firing away,

when suddenly to our surprise, it emerged with a small fish, rather than the more usual invertebrate-meal."

Rob is a regular contributor to the Trust's photography group on Facebook, and also has his own page at www.facebook.com/COOLPIX2019/

Poetic celebration

Trust member Rob Evans, of Stafford, penned this beautiful poem, 'The Song Thrush', to accompany his photograph. You can read more of his work on his Facebook page, entitled 'Rob Evans - Poetry'.

Fresh mornings herald calls, mellifluous repeats.
Echoed variations, warbled, Spring distilled.
Lush full-throated solo, that calls "I'm here, I'm here!"
Missives, slightly plaintive, yet joyous are his notes.

Convuluted melody, glory Walton envied.
Drifts across vanilla scented golden.
Perched proud, speckled breasted atop the
fragrant May,
His diverse ringing flutes, leaves the heart
contented.

Familiar though alas, less often seen or heard.



Rare the shell strewn anvil, now mute the stone
struck blow.
No pale brown head, half-cocked, to spy
emergent worms,
Their bounding gait has left a jaded vacant
swarth.

MORE TOP PICS



The essence of
autumn

Stephen Shorrock, of Cheslyn Hay, shared these autumnal photos of Brindley Heath on the Trust's Facebook Photography Group.



A multitude of
mushrooms

Stuart Staley discovered this profusion of fairy ink caps growing on a tree trunk near his home in Adderley Green, Stoke-on-Trent.



Making
himself at home!

Josephine Bailey, of Birches Head, snapped this baby squirrel in her garden!

KEEP IN TOUCH



/StaffsWildlife



/StaffsWildlife



/staffswt

YOUR QUESTIONS

Monitoring officer Jonathan Groom answers your wildlife queries



What can I do in my garden over winter to help wildlife?

Jonathan says: Feeding the birds is always a source of enjoyment and can help keep them alive in harsh conditions. Remember to put a source of fresh water out too.

Be sure to keep all your feeders and water trays clean to avoid spreading disease, and clean out nestboxes too ready for spring. Leave 'untidy' areas in the garden. Resist the

urge to trim back all your herbaceous borders and ivy. Why not introduce a compost heap, leaf piles or bundles of dead plant stems around the edges of the garden? These provide habitat for a huge range of animals - from hedgehogs to microinvertebrates. Put a small floating ball in your pond to help it stop freezing over completely.

Should I feed the badgers and foxes that visit my garden?

Jonathan says: You can certainly do this, especially if the weather gets very cold or wet for a prolonged period.

You can buy specially formulated food, or you could put out wet dog or cat food, unsalted peanuts or mealworms. Avoid salted or spiced leftovers!

Don't put out too much food, or they will become dependent in it. Ideally, put things out at a set time to encourage a routine. Avoid trying to attract them too close to the house or hand-feeding them.



GOT A QUESTION?



/StaffsWildlife



info@staffs-wildlife.org.uk



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QUICK FIRE

I regularly hear tawny owls calling near my home at night. Any advice on spotting them?



Spotting owls can be tricky. You may be able to see them roosting in the day if you are lucky. At night you really need a clear, moonlit night and use binoculars with a wide lens which will let more light in. You will need a torch to find your way but don't try and spotlight the owl with it as it may temporarily ruin its nightvision.



I've got bats roosting in my loft. What should I do?

Ideally, nothing! Bats are a protected species and are beneficial to us – they eat lots of flies and mosquitoes! You may need to put protective sheets over things stored in your loft to protect them from droppings but otherwise hopefully you can live with them as they don't generally cause any damage or present any health hazards.

For more advice, check out the Bat Conservation Trust's website: www.bats.org.uk/advice/living-with-bats.

DAMIAN WATERS DRUMIMAGES.CO.UK

TOM MARSHALL - PHOTO TAKEN UNDER LICENCE

ANDREW PARKINSON/2020 VISION

MY *WILD* LIFE



Alana Wheat

Keele University student Alana Wheat is on a mission to make campus as wildlife-friendly and sustainable as possible. She talks to Editor Liz Peck about what drives her and what she will bring to the charity in her new role as a Trustee.



My parents were very keen on me exploring the natural world as a child, and I remember building dens and poking sticks into mud from when I was about four years old. We live next to a large field and near to the River Tean, so there was always a lot of wildlife around me, and we used to go out with my grandparents on their narrowboat, and I would carry out mini wildlife surveys while I was on board.

Recently I've become more of a bird-watcher. During lockdown, we discovered nesting tawny owls on one of our local walks, and this made me want to keep going walking so I could see how they were doing. There were five chicks, and they have all fledged. Recently I saw one flying over the house, which was wonderful.

I've just graduated from Keele University with a First Class degree in Geography, and I'm returning to do a Masters in Youth Activism and the Green Recovery. At the end of my first year at Keele, I decided to set up Keele Wildlife Society. We have such a beautiful green campus but I discovered that not many students had ventured out to explore it.

Keele Wildlife Society arranges guided walks around the campus for students, and we also have talks and practical events such as litter picks. Last year we secured 300 trees from the Woodland Trust and planted them all around campus. There were about 50 volunteers, made up of students and staff, and even local residents who were out on a walk got roped in! It was a brilliant experience.

One of the big highlights of last year was when Sir David Attenborough came to Keele to mark our 70th birthday. It was incredible to listen to him.

One of the initiatives I am leading is to make the campus at Keele hedgehog-friendly. This involves raising awareness among staff and students that there are hedgehogs on campus, and also working with the university's grounds and estates team to make sure we have hedgehog-friendly policies in place, such as having wild areas around campus and hedgehog highways in our buildings.

I really enjoy my role as senior sustainability intern with Green:Keele. I've been involved in lots of exciting things such as helping to organise the Keele Green Festival, which is a two-week celebration of sustainability. As part of that, students can join workshops such as seedball-making and vegetable growing. The Green Team is made of people in a variety of different roles across campus, and we are involved in promoting energy-saving and zero waste, as well as encouraging students to use our walled allotments. We also have an initiative called 'The Great Donate', where students who have graduated can donate items such as pots and pans to be reused by new students coming in.

I was awarded a Staffordshire Wildlife Medal earlier this year and afterwards I was asked if I would be interested in becoming a Trustee of the Trust. I was extremely honoured to be asked. I think I can bring to the board my experience in working in sustainability, which is obviously an area that the Trust is very interested in.

“One of the initiatives I am leading is to make the campus at Keele hedgehog-friendly.”

The two big issues that I feel very strongly about are the climate emergency and ecological crisis facing us. All the science and the evidence is there, and we all need to act – everyone from individuals to large organisations. Personally, I am careful about eating as locally and seasonably as possible, reducing waste and my water footprint. It is really important to me to try and inspire others too. I run two youth clubs in the area and I have introduced reusable cups instead of disposable ones. I think it is vital to install these simple grassroots actions in people's heads.

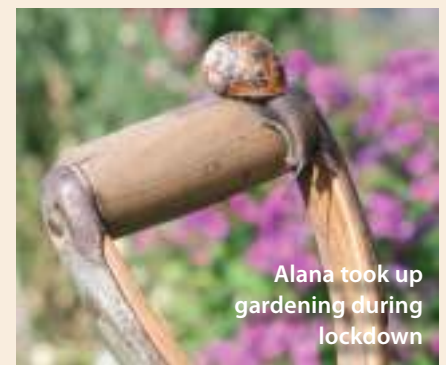


Why I love...

Alana shares her three favourite ways to connect with nature in lockdown

Exploring my local patch

During lockdown, I got out the OS map and started exploring new places close to home. In normal times, I wouldn't think of doing this. But in lockdown there was more time to do it, and it really made me realise how much of the area around my home I didn't know about. I walked and rambled on lots of new paths.



Alana took up gardening during lockdown

Gardening

I picked up a spade and discovered a love of gardening in lockdown. We started a small vegetable patch, growing things like onions, potatoes, carrots, turnips, lettuces and strawberries. Growing and eating home grown food reduces your carbon footprint, and I was also surprised at the amount of wildlife that visited the veg garden.

Bird-watching

I started paying attention to the birds around us during lockdown. I watched three broods of sparrows nesting in the apex of our roof and listened to the evening chorus.



Sparrows nested in the eaves of the house

TOM MARSHALL

BEN HALL/2020 VISION

Could saving wildlife
for future generations
be part of your legacy?



Photo © Mark Hamblin/ 2020Vision

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For more information on leaving a gift to Staffordshire's wildlife in your will,
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