



Staffordshire
Wildlife Trust

Winter 2024

wild

Staffordshire



Wonderful wetlands

Discover how our projects are boosting these vital habitats

Doubling nature's chances

Be part of something big this winter

A wilder Stafford

Project inspires communities to make their neighbourhoods wilder

Let Laura's love of nature inspire

A story of drive and determination

WELCOME

From our Chair



It's been a busy year so far at SWT and that's without all the changes in national government. With new MPs being elected this summer, the Trust has been at the forefront after meeting with candidates ahead of the election. SWT has advocated the importance of bringing nature back and elevating its priority in their manifestos. The Trust has written to all new MPs, requesting conversations about how they're going to really take action for wildlife. I was proud to walk alongside over 80,000 people at the Restore Nature Now march in London this summer, delivering a strong message to the incoming government.

People power should never be underestimated. And the need for unity is ever present. Our united voice simply cannot be ignored. Clean rivers and more space for nature, with ample opportunities for all communities to enjoy it, are evergreen demands which are not going to go away.

In Staffordshire, so many people are already taking inspiring action for wildlife. This local effort really does make a difference. This edition features some great examples of just that: communities making space for nature in Stafford through the Nextdoor Nature project and a proactive young woman campaigning to make space for nature in My Wild Life.

The Trust's project work has been full steam ahead over the summer, including Stafford Brooks, a significant project you can find out more about inside this edition. A lease of new land in the Peak District means the Trust is able to use Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme funding to reconnect the Blake Brook with its floodplain (SSSI). This restoration work will set the foundations in place to create a more nature rich landscape over years to come and hopefully support the return of rare species such as the black grouse.

This year we bid a fond farewell to Martin, who retires after 30 years. Martin is an unsung hero who has been the Trust's 'go to guy' for all things practical and technical for so long. Thank you Martin, you'll be greatly missed and I wish you a very happy retirement.

I also want to recognise the fantastic dedication and commitment of our volunteers who contribute so much to the work of SWT. Without the hundreds of volunteers that turn up each week, we could not achieve the many advances in our work to protect nature.

It's with great sadness that we lost one of our most dedicated and long serving volunteers, Eddie Turvey. Eddie passed away in July and we've included a special tribute to him.

As winter approaches we have some suggestions of ways you can stay connected to nature, and of course our nature reserves remain open for you to explore and enjoy winter walks. So as one year blends into another, I thank you for your support of SWT and look forward to seeing all that 2025 has to bring.

Steve

Steve Smith, Chair

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Staffordshire Wildlife Trust **Get in touch**

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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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Barn Owl Action Group

Staffordshire Fungi Group

Staffordshire Mammal Group

Staffordshire Bat Group

Staffordshire Invertebrate Group



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GUY EDWARDES 2020VISION

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ADE SHEPHERD

Your Wild Winter

Have a hoot owl

in Staffordshire

With less daylight, winter is the perfect time to head out at dawn or dusk to see owls. If you're lucky to live near woodland, you may already be very familiar with the sound of tawny owls calling to one another. Our reserves offer the perfect chance to hear and see owls. Here we share the three you're most likely to come across in Staffordshire.

RUSSEL SAVORY



Short-eared owl

These striking 'shortie' owls prefer to be out and about during daylight. They frequent moorlands and if you're lucky you might spot one flying low, or perched on a stone gatepost or wall in the Staffordshire Moorlands. They're of European conservation concern and an Amber List species. In winter, resident birds are joined by migrants from the continent, so there's a much better chance of seeing one. Their call is very distinct – short, sharp and raspy with a heightened pitch at the end. They feed on small mammals, especially voles, making grassy moorlands the perfect hunting ground for them. They nest on the ground in scraped-out hollows lined with grass and downy feathers.



BEN HALL, 2020VISION

spotting



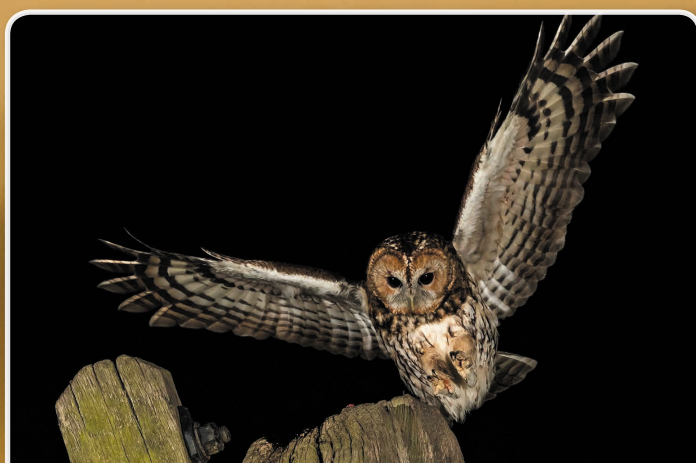
RUSSEL SAVORY

Barn owl

These owls love to hunt over open rough grasslands and farmland with margins and ditches.

The Forest of Needwood with its veteran trees is the perfect place for them. They feed mainly on mice, voles and shrews, and sometimes larger mammals and small birds too.

Listen for their haunting raspy shrieks and hissing calls and watch for their low, graceful and silent flight over fields and hedgerows at dawn and dusk.



THINESH THIRUGNANASAMPANTHAR

Tawny owl

Tawny owls like broadleaved woodland. They can also be found in pockets of urban and suburban woodland if there are enough mature trees for them to roost and nest. Like barn owls, their stealthy flight makes them successful hunters. They swoop down from their lofty perches to grab unsuspecting prey from the woodland floor. They usually mate for life and don't venture far from their territory, utilising old crows' nests and squirrel dreys to nest. Mice and voles make up most of their diet, but they'll also feed on birds, frogs, fish, small rabbits, and even insects and worms when food is particularly scarce. Listen for the iconic 'hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo' call of the male and the shrill 'kew-wick' reply from the female. If you're lucky, you may spot a roosting bird sleeping in a tree during the day!

SPECIES FOCUS

A waxwing winter

If you see one of these distinctive birds you'll certainly notice it! Some winters, like last year, an influx of waxwings arrive in England. These surges of activity are aptly named irruptions. This happens when their numbers at breeding grounds on the continent are too great and there's simply not enough food to go around.

They often descend in urban areas. For example, last year they favoured a Stoke-on-Trent street which provided rowan trees with plentiful berries for them to feast on. You might even find them in supermarket car parks, which seem to feature rowans more than any other tree. They also eat hawthorn berries, and rose hips. They're quite plump and slightly smaller than a starling. They have a prominent crest of feathers that stick up at the back of their heads, with a bandit style black mask running from the top of their beaks to the back of their heads. Their plumage is reddish-brown with a black throat, yellow and white in the wings and a yellow-tipped tail.



T J ELLIS



T J ELLIS

Flocks of finches

Resident goldfinches, greenfinches, and linnets are sometimes joined by brambling, a winter visitor from Scandinavia. As insects become scarce, they survive on a diet of seeds, using their thick bills to strip them from hedgerows and trees. They're a common sight at our Doxey Marshes Nature Reserve, so if you visit this winter look out for flocks of them flitting about the hedgerows. If you're lucky you may also spot bullfinch.

Winter is a great time to keep an eye out for chaffinch too. These beautiful birds are quite striking and have a nice uplifting but repetitive song. We get an influx over colder months, as resident birds are joined by migrants from Europe.



GILLIAN DAY

Bewick's swan

This winter visitor is the smallest and rarest of swans in the UK. Bewick's swans arrive from Siberia in late autumn, before heading north again in March. They can be seen on farmland during the day, where they feed on crops, like leftover potatoes and grain, before heading to roost on open water overnight. Look out for them at our wetland nature reserves, such as Croxall and Tuckleshome.

They can be tricky to tell apart from whooper swans but Bewick's are smaller with more rounded heads. Their bills also have less yellow on them than whooper swans and in flight they have faster wingbeats. Young Bewick's are grey with a pinkish bill.

**SEE THIS...**

21 December marks the longest night, the winter solstice. With a late dawn take the chance to watch the sunrise if cloud cover allows! Head to your nearest body of water to enjoy the acoustics of the wild fowl and light reflecting off the water.

**DO THIS...**

Resist tidying away all the dead plants and foliage. By leaving some wild patches you'll be providing shelter for bugs, and leaving seed heads for another food source for birds when grubs are scarce.

NATURE SPY

Sarah Davison uncovers signs to identify trees and shrubs during winter and early spring woodland wanders.



JON HAWKINS, SURREY HILLS PHOTOGRAPHY

Sweet chestnut

These long lived giants were introduced by the Romans for their nuts, which were ground into flour. Trees over 25-years-old produce these festive 'chestnuts' encased in prickly husks. Identify them in winter by looking for their bark: it swirls around their trunks with deep fissures. They belong to the same family as oaks and beeches.



GUY EDWARDES, 2020VISION

English oak

This beloved tree creates an elegant silhouette against a dusk winter's evening sky, with its magnificent, spreading crown and rounded outline of sturdy branches. If ever in doubt if you're looking at an oak, look for the tree's rounded buds which are formed in clusters, with more than three scales on each bud.



GUY EDWARDES, 2020VISION

Sycamore

On older trees look for the dark pink-grey bark which is cracked with small 'plates'. In winter you can identify it by its pink-brown and hairless twigs. In spring look for long pink-pale green leaf buds. Introduced to the UK long ago, they can be found in parks, woodlands, and also urban streets, as they have good resilience to pollution.



PHILIP BRECEY

Silver birch

These striking deciduous trees have distinct silvery-white bark, making them an easy tree to identify in winter. Reaching up to 30 metres in height they feature delicate drooping branches. Their bark sheds layers like tissue paper, becoming black and rugged at the base. As the trees mature the bark develops dark, diamond-shaped fissures.



Common alder

This damp-loving tree is found along riversides and in wet woodlands. Its wood doesn't rot and traditionally it was used to make charcoal and clogs. It holds onto its seeds into winter, providing a much needed food source for many birds, including siskins. As we transition to spring look out for its oval purplish buds.



VAUGHN MATTHEWS

Goat willow

The most common of UK willows, this small tree is found in ditches, reedbeds, and wet woodlands. In January it bursts with many silver fluffy catkins, which earned it the well-known nickname of 'pussy willow'. By March the male catkins turn yellow when ripe and the female catkins are green.



Dogwood

Not a tree but a broadleaf shrub which is often found in damp woodland edges and hedgerows – we have it at The Wolsley Centre. During the colder months its red twigs are a sure giveaway. As the season shifts into spring, its bare crimson branches become covered with green leaves, ready to flower and fruit.



VAUGHN MATTHEWS

Ash

Ash trees are easily identified in winter by their smooth twigs with distinctive black, velvety leaf buds arranged opposite each other. Their winged fruits develop in late summer and autumn, hanging in bunches known as 'keys'. These fall from the tree during winter and early spring, and are dispersed by birds and mammals.



Common beech

Beeches have smooth, thin, grey bark which often features slight horizontal etchings. Their reddish brown leaf buds are sharply pointed and stand away from the twigs on short stalks, and they have a distinctive criss-cross pattern. Beech trees often hold on to their leaves throughout winter too, a trait known as marcescence.



JOHN STANNEY

Swineholes Wood

A winter wander at Swineholes Wood

Set in an exposed spot in the Staffordshire Moorlands lies Ipstones Edge, a reserve of three parts. The Swineholes Wood section makes for an interesting wild winter wander... Park in the layby, cross the road to enter the reserve through the wooden gate, then turn immediately left over the wall and take a clockwise walk around the edge of the reserve. It is steep and wet, with stiles too, so take care and be sure to wear sturdy footwear.

Take in the beautiful outlines of the stunted oak wood and majestic scots pines - if conditions are right you may see hoar frost coating these. On a clear day you can enjoy far reaching views across to The Roaches, the Morridge and The Wrekin. You may also find reindeer lichen and birch polypore fungus, and it's a good time to spot polypody fern growing on the leaf-free trees.

Keep an eye to the sky for red kites which are often seen here. Also take time to look down! Winter is a great time to spot deer tracks and droppings in snow, frost or mud. There are red and roe deer here so keep your eyes peeled for them, and look for signs of their presence - roe leave small tracks and their droppings are like small black baked beans! Red deer tracks are much larger and their droppings are chunky with dimples. If you visit while there is snow on the ground, also look for the tracks of small mammals, birds, foxes and badger snuffle holes.



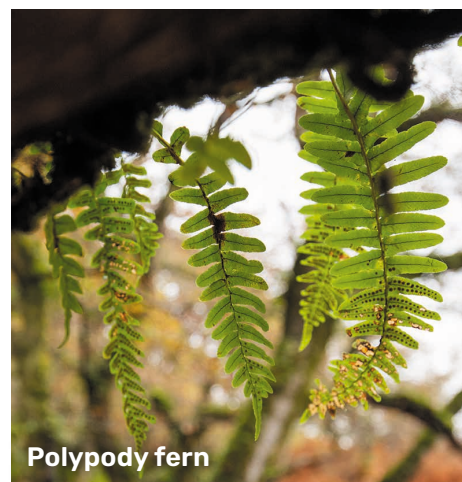
Reindeer lichen

JOHN STANNEY



Birch polypore

VAUGHN MATTHEWS



Polypody fern

BEN PORTER

As the seasons shift and things warm up Jackson's Coppice and Marsh near Bishop's Offley and Sugnall makes for an uplifting spring visit.

There are two different habitats to explore here – a lush marshland and ancient woodland up the hill. Begin your visit by heading straight through the gate to take a wander along the boardwalk to take in views of the marshland and wet alder woodland, which is known as carr. From March onwards marsh loving plants begin to flourish – look out for marsh marigolds, yellow flag iris and opposite-leaved golden saxifrage.

The marsh is fed by the River Sow and is part of an historic landscape. As early

as 1250 Walk Mill and Offley Brook Mill operated nearby and caused raised water levels on the marsh. The surrounding fields were managed as water meadows and cut for hay until the 1950s.

Your efforts will be rewarded if you make the steep climb to the woodland above the marsh. We know from records that this woodland has existed for at least 400 years. The woodland is made up of oak, rowan, hazel, beech, hornbeam and sweet chestnut trees creating a fantastic habitat for wildlife. You can also see bird cherry trees by the road, an unusual tree for the area. If you visit later in spring, there's a pretty display of bluebells. Listen out for nuthatch, long tailed tits, marsh tits and great spotted woodpeckers.

A spring jaunt at Jackson's Coppice and Marsh



Yellow flag iris

VAUGHN MATTHEWS



Marsh tit

LUKE MASSEY, 2020VISION

Opposite leaved
golden saxifrage



CHRIS LAWRENCE

Know before you go

Before visiting either of these reserves, please find location and accessibility information in your reserve guide, or on the Trust's website:

staffs-wildlife.org.uk/nature-reserves

It might be tempting not to venture out much in winter, but you might be surprised by the sense of satisfaction you find after wrapping up to brave the elements. It can be really uplifting – even in the poorest of weather, and help to keep SAD (seasonal affective disorder) feelings at bay.

There are also things you can do from the comfort of your home, with your biggest cosiest jumper on and a cuppa. The choice is yours, as nature helps us all in different ways. The important thing is finding what works for you.

So without further ado, here are our top five tips to inspire you to stay wild this winter... Nature is calling you!

1 Get moving! It doesn't matter if you walk or wheel, add some movement to your day and benefit your body in many ways. You don't have to go far, simply take a wander around your garden if you have one and observe the changes to any plants, the grass, the earth. Have a stretch while you're there, reach for the sky with both hands as you inhale, then slowly exhale and fold forwards, curl down one vertebrae at a time, hinging at the hips to see if you can touch your knees, your shins, your toes (it doesn't matter if you can't). Or if you prefer, stretch your neck, look upwards, downwards, side-to-side. If you're able to, see if you can set yourself a daily step goal and try to

stick to it. You can stay local, taking in the sights of your neighbourhood or visit somewhere new (see pages 8 and 9 for some nature reserve visit suggestions). So, grab your big coat and your wellies. Step outside, relish the feeling of a biting wind on your face, or the sound of rain washing over the landscape. Awaken all your senses and let the elements of our natural world invigorate you.

2 Better together. While it can be nice to enjoy some solitude, meeting with a friend or family member for some time outside can help you stay motivated. If you both commit to going out no matter the weather, unless it's dangerous, then you'll both

How to stay wild this winter: Our top tips

Sarah Davison



ZSUZSANNA BIRD

benefit from making the effort to get together outdoors. You could try a new walk or learn how to identify trees in winter (see our handy Nature Spy on page 7). Is there anything better than a crisp, blue sky on a midwinter day? Let's embrace them – grab any time outside that you can – even if it's just a 10-minute stroll on your lunch break or a walk to the shop. Could you get your colleagues to take a mass outdoor tea-break? Or make that meeting with your boss a walking one?

3 A season for the senses. Take a moment to really notice things and drink in the detail: frost fringed leaves, the brightness of the stars on a clear night, the contrast of dark trees against freshly fallen snow. Take a deep breath, feel your lungs fill with cool air and watch as your breath billows out in puffy

clouds. Enjoy the sound of your feet crunching frosty ground, or even snow. Listen for the sounds of winter wildlife: a blackbird's dusk symphony, the cheerful song of a thrush, the after dark call of tawny owls. Inhale the earthy smell of damp woodlands, with moss and decaying leaves mingling to create an intoxicating blend. As for taste, enjoy a hot beverage and snack outdoors – you could even make a new family tradition of warm drinks (mulled wine anyone?) and mince pies in the garden or park to mark the start of the new year.

4 Give. Giving isn't just for Christmas and it doesn't have to cost. You could give your time to local community projects, or others who might need a hand with something. Research shows that completing just one act of kindness every week over a 6-week period increases wellbeing. If you don't have much time this could be as simple as feeding the birds, especially when food is scarce over winter. If you have a bit more time you could talk to your neighbours and start a group to help improve your neighbourhood together. You could join our team of volunteers and help to run our charity shops, visitor centre, engagement events or care

for our nature reserves. Volunteering is an ideal way to meet new people too. Head to [staffs-wildlife.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities](https://www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities) for current opportunities.

5 Keep learning. Always wanted to make your yard or garden more wildlife friendly or learn about companion planting? Winter is the ideal time to do this, with more time to plan and research at home during the darker evenings. It's important to be realistic according to the time you have, so only set yourself challenging but achievable goals. If you don't have much time to spare, you could commit to learning one new species a day, or beginning a nature journal to jot down your thoughts, sightings, or doodles. If you have a little more time, you could enrol on a free online course – see next page for info on our free Wilder Neighbourhoods online workshops, or join one of our exclusive members' walks – we've even got one dedicated to finding the famous Bob (black oil beetle) at Highgate Common in early spring!

■ **If you fancy getting hands on, you could learn to make something that benefits wildlife, like a bee hotel or log shelter. There's lots of inspiration on our website:** www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/actions



Inhale the earthy smell of damp woodlands, with moss and decaying leaves



BEN PORTER

Wilder Neighbourhoods in Stoke

Kathryn Kavanagh

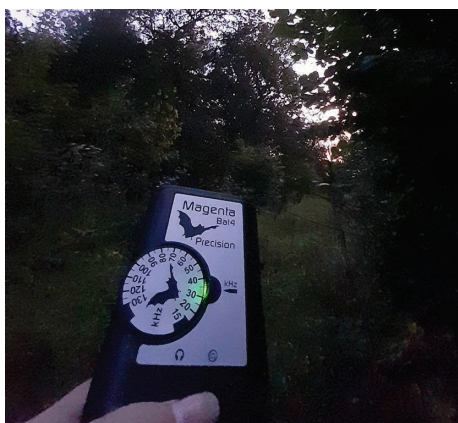


Want to join us on one of our walks?
Check our events webpage for our latest events
www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/events

Our Wilder Neighbourhoods project has been benefitting residents in the city for just over a year now. Senior Wilder Communities Officer Kathryn explains how this Know your Neighbourhood funded project is helping to reduce loneliness by providing people with opportunities to connect to nature, and other local people.

Making a step change

Stepping out in nature is an inexpensive and simple way to connect, not just to nature but to other people too. An important element of this project is reducing isolation by providing easily accessible opportunities for people to enjoy their community and local green spaces. One of the ways we do this is by inviting local residents to join us on fortnightly walks across Stoke-on-Trent.



These walks enable people to confidently visit places they've not been to before and discover the nature on their doorstep. As we walk around these places, I'll encourage everyone to see what they can spot and help them learn wildlife identification techniques. Not only do these walks improve physical health, they also boost their mood and many friendships are formed too as they chat with fellow walkers.

Stoke-on-Trent is one of the UK's greenest cities. It's rich with green spaces, parks and nature reserves which are all unique and lovely places to walk and talk. We want to give people the support to take those steps, together.

Nature connection

Alongside our regular walks we are also working with local community groups to offer nature connection activities and micro volunteering opportunities. These are generally small activities that have benefits to both the environment and your wellbeing. We've also recorded a free online workshop, so you can learn more about nature connection and how it can help you and others at your leisure. You can watch it hereby scanning this QR code.



Record as you walk

Our Roving Ranger's initiative is a way of volunteering in your own time. You can do it whenever you want to, so it's easy to fit around other commitments. It combines the joy of walking in nature with the satisfaction of recording wildlife. For a bit of company and to share skills with like-minded people we offer occasional Roving Ranger walks at the Trust's Hem Heath Nature Reserve. These group walks are a great way to get started as a Roving Ranger, using iNaturalist to record what we discover as we explore the reserve. We've also included some specialist walks to boost our walkers' knowledge of the natural world; we've focused on cultural heritage, bats and fungi! We also did a bio blitz for the City Nature Challenge back in spring.



Great Gifts for a Green Christmas

We have the perfect gifts for those special wildlife enthusiasts in your life. By shopping with us, you support our vital conservation efforts across Staffordshire.

From our range of wild Christmas jumpers in our TeeMill shop to the décor and baubles available at The Wolseley Centre.

We also have a range of Christmas cards and our 2025 calendar available online, at The Wolseley Centre and our charity shops in Leek, Penkridge, and Codsall.

The calendar is just £10, and large cards (153mm) are £6 and small cards (120mm) are £5. Postage for the online shop is £3.95 or you can collect your calendar/cards from The Wolseley Centre.

Online shop: staffordshire-wildlife-trust-store.myshopify.com/

TeeMill: staffs-wildlife-shop.teemill.com/



Don't forget, you can go even greener by sending a virtual card by email. Simply pick one of our designs and donate your chosen amount.
bit.ly/swtecards



Just for YOU

Make 2025 your year to get out and enjoy nature. Join us for an exclusive free members' walk, a little thank you for all of your support for wildlife. To book, visit the event links below – just type the bit.ly address into your browser, or scan the QR codes. You can also register your interest with our membership team by calling 01889 880100.

Walk with us at Doxey Marshes 10am – 12pm, Friday 10 January

Join Jeff Sim, Head of Nature Reserves, for a guided new year's walk. With over 200 species recorded here and over 80 breeding species, there's plenty to see. Doxey is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to its nationally important populations of lapwing, snipe and redshank.
<https://bit.ly/doxeymarshwalk>



Native Daffodils, George's Hayes & Piggot's Bottom 9.30am – 12.30pm, Tuesday 11 March

On this walk Jeff will guide you around two beautiful ancient woodlands – George's Hayes and Piggot's Bottom. Both boast vibrant spring displays of native wild daffodils – the largest in the county! Wild garlic will also be starting to appear along with wood anemones and maybe even some bluebells starting to shoot.
<https://bit.ly/daffodilsatgeorges>



Oil beetle count and guided walk, Highgate Common 9.30am – 12pm, Thursday 13 March

Join the southern heathlands ranger team to explore the habitat of the extraordinary oil beetle. We'll explain what work we've done here to improve the habitat for these special creatures. You'll also get to discover their amazing life cycle and help us count them.
<https://bit.ly/oilbeetleshighgate>



Be inspired: Nextdoor Nature



As our Nextdoor Nature Stafford initiative draws to a close, we celebrate the many wonderful projects that have come from this National Lottery Heritage funded programme. Over the last two years the programme has supported a variety of projects, from small wildflower road verges to large community nature reserves. Every one of them, and the people making them happen, play a vital role in maintaining and improving biodiversity and people's wellbeing in our beautiful county town.

Winning Prima Magazine's national public vote for 'featured pocket garden' has been an exciting experience. It enabled us to document the transformation of the once unloved piece of land on the corner of Sandon Road with Lloyd Street.

The Stafford charity, House of Bread, has adopted the plot and their friends, staff, and volunteers have worked exceptionally hard with local residents, including those from Marston Road's Turning Point sheltered hostel, to transform this neglected patch into an oasis for

butterflies, bees and birds. Passers-by have donated plants and commented about how the garden brightens their day as they pass on their way into town. Chris, House of Bread volunteer, mentions the positive impact for nature and mental health, "The site was extremely overgrown. It has been hugely rewarding to see the dramatic transformation. It's been great to see Friends of House of Bread getting involved, they have found it such a rewarding experience."

A major highlight of 2024 has been the grand opening of this garden. It was officially opened by Leader of Stafford Borough Council, Aidan Godfrey, who has shown much support for the project. As part of the celebrations a new 'Chatty Bench' was donated by Anchor Care Homes, installed by Stafford Streetscene, and unveiled by special guest Universal Woman Great Britain, Natalie Mageza. Many thanks are due for the support from all involved at this largely upcycled garden with its water trough pond, vibrant array of plant contributions nestled into colourful tyre planters, and winding slate path, made from roof tiles donated by

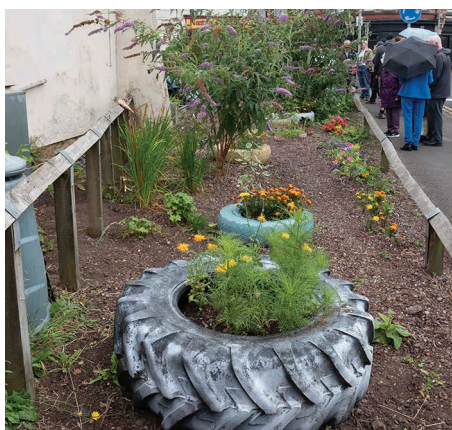
"Prima is all about celebrating community so to see the Lloyd Street community garden in Stafford being transformed into an area for everyone to enjoy has been such a joy and a privilege. Before, it was a messy, overgrown, and forgotten piece of land and now it's bursting with colourful plants and somewhere for people to sit and spend time. The people of Stafford have told us that seeing it makes them smile so we at Prima like to call it the Garden of Smiles. That's something for any community to be proud of."

Jo Checkly,
Editor-in Chief at Prima Magazine



Stafford Constitutional Club and Stafford Roofing. This was a joyous celebration of everything achieved in such a short time across the borough for people and nature.

Whilst this high profile makeover has recently taken centre stage, there have been many other inspiring things happening in the Common and Coton area, and across Stafford. The 15th Stafford Brownies have built bug hotels and planted nectar-rich flowers and apple trees in Sandon Road's brick planter. Meanwhile, local volunteers, supported by nearby Travis Perkins builders' merchants



and the Priory Garden Centre, have built path-side perennial planters to increase their wildflower islands. Keen volunteer, Chris, has indulged in her passion for nature by installing a bug hotel and leaving a wild patch at the ATS Euromaster Stafford garage. She says, "ATS deserve praise for this initiative. They also donated tyres for the community garden down the road."

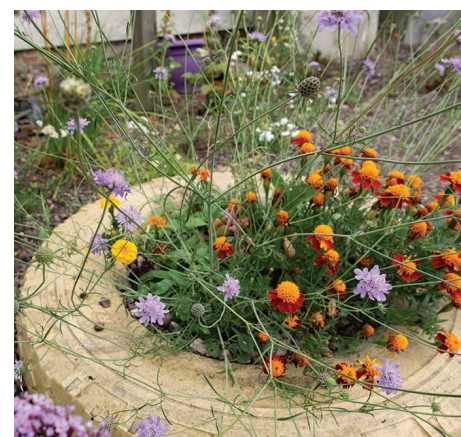
Over in Forebridge, Stafford and Rugeley Sea Cadets teamed up with Wren House, housing for older people and people with support needs, to help the residents maintain their gardens. The Cadets have also sown their own wildflower meadows at their base on Riverway. Fieldhouse Bowling Club has 'greened up around the greens', planting native hedgerow including crab apple, hawthorn, and goat willow. St. Joseph's Convent Nursing home has installed bird boxes in the mature trees within its grounds, all hand painted by residents. Queensville Avenue residents focused on helping swifts with Richard, FMS garage owner, building swift nest boxes for neighbours. This year, starlings have largely taken up residence,

but swifts have been spotted and will hopefully be tempted back by the playing of swift calls next year.

Stafford Samaritans planted a new woodland area at Meadow Road Park in Penside and installed a bench overlooking the trees. Damon Preece of Stafford Samaritans said, "We wanted to create an area where people could sit and talk to improve emotional health. Every time I have passed, there has been a local sitting on this bench enjoying this wonderful place." With the support of Borough Councillor Ralph Cooke and Penside Community Champions, he would like to see the local community, and in particular Silkmore Primary Academy, engaging with the project: "It has to be ongoing and be embedded in the community."

From the outset the whole ethos of Nextdoor Nature was to inspire communities to transform areas in their street or neighbourhood, and to join together to care for where they live to make it better for nature and people. While it's sad this project is ending, it's not the end by any means. Staffordshire Wildlife Trust simply planted the metaphorical seed; the communities of Stafford have decided what to grow and where. These are their spaces, places which are now a little bit wilder. We're already seeing other people being inspired to take care of spaces around the town. Feeling inspired? Wherever you live, you can do something good too - just approach whoever owns the land, make a plan and get your neighbours involved!

Unsure where to start? Feel free to reach out to us for advice by emailing wilderenquiries@staffs-wildlife.org.uk. While this project has ended we're still able to signpost to ongoing groups and resources which will help you get started.





**Christmas
Challenge**

BigGive

Give Staffordshire's wildlife double the chance!

Christine Harding

This year the Trust is taking part in The Big Give Christmas Challenge, an online fundraising campaign that offers supporters the chance to make donations that are worth twice as much. All donations received during this fundraising week will be matched from funds pledged by a group of generous supporters and a Big Give Champion Funder.

The Big Give Challenge week runs from Tuesday 3 December until midday on Tuesday 10 December. Every donation made online during this time will be doubled from the match fund until we hit our target of £18,000. However, you don't need to wait for this week to start your fundraising events... If you are planning a bake sale, a non-uniform day, or any other fundraising event, please consider fundraising for us! This is an amazing opportunity to make your efforts go twice as far and bring double the benefit to local wildlife! All funds raised will go twice as far in preserving and enhancing the wildlife and wild places that make Staffordshire so special.

So, if you were thinking about donating to us this year during the giving season, we ask that you please save your donation for this important week, where we can make the very most of your generosity for the special wild places and wildlife we all love and enjoy.

The funds raised during The Big Give will directly contribute to critical conservation work on our 45 nature reserves. It's our mission to keep these areas in great condition for wildlife, and also to spark joy and inspiration for the people of Staffordshire.

Our ongoing conservation work in Staffordshire's wetlands and floodplains will benefit, both on our own reserves and also on private land, working with landowners around the county. Wetland habitats, such as those found at Doxey Marshes, are among the most biodiverse environments in the region, supporting a wide range of bird species, including snipe, lapwing, and even the elusive bittern. The Trust's work in managing these wetlands involves controlling

**The funds raised during
The Big Give will directly
contribute to critical
conservation work on
our 45 nature reserves**



Lapwing

KEVIN PALMER



Parrot's Drumble



vegetation and creating new habitats to support wildlife. By donating to The Big Give, you can help ensure that these important wetlands continue to provide a sanctuary for wildlife and a place of natural beauty for people to enjoy.

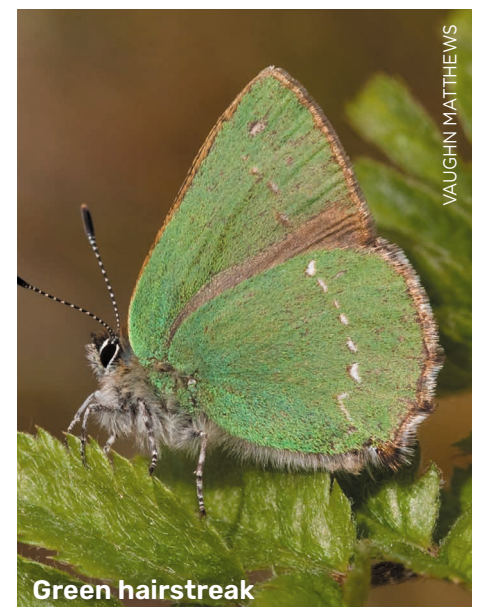
Another vital area that will benefit are our heathlands. This year we are taking on more management of the iconic Cannock Chase, one of the UK's largest areas of heathland. This ancient landscape, with its heather-clad hills and tranquil woodlands, is a haven for rare species such as the nightjar, woodlark, and the beautiful green hairstreak butterfly. Through your donations, the Trust will be able to continue its efforts to protect and restore this unique habitat, ensuring that it remains a thriving ecosystem for future generations.

The Trust is also focused on the preservation of ancient woodlands, which are some of the most irreplaceable habitats in Staffordshire. These woodlands, such as Parrot's Drumble and the beautiful Brankley Pastures, are home to a rich variety of plant and animal species, including some that are rare or endangered. The funds raised during The Big Give will enable the Trust to carry out vital work in these woodlands, such as managing invasive species, protecting ancient trees, and creating new woodland areas to increase biodiversity. Beyond these specific projects, your support will also help the Trust in its broader mission of connecting people with nature. Staffordshire Wildlife Trust runs a wide range of educational

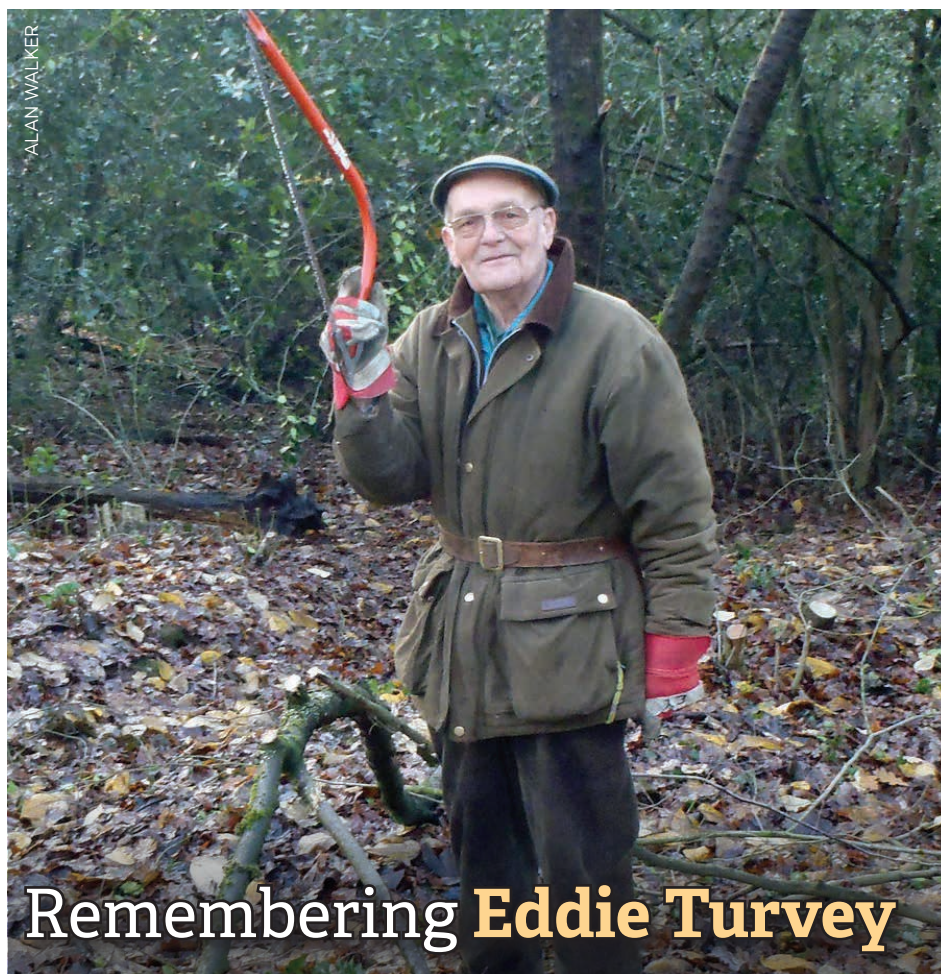
programmes, community outreach initiatives, and volunteer opportunities that inspire people of all ages to learn about and care for the natural world. Whether it's a school group visiting a nature reserve for the first time, a family participating in a wildlife walk, or volunteers getting hands-on with conservation work, these programmes are crucial for fostering a lifelong love of nature and building a community of people who are committed to protecting it.

By donating, you are taking action for wildlife in our wonderful county and enabling us to do right by nature. So please mark your calendars for Tuesday 3 December and make your donation at: bit.ly/swtbiggive

MARK HAMBLIN, 2020VISION



Green hairstreak



Many will fondly remember Eddie Turvey, long-standing volunteer and supporter of the Trust, who passed away peacefully on 24th July aged 92 years.

Eddie made a huge contribution to the Trust over many, many years. He was a lovely, genuine, humorous, knowledgeable, loyal, hard-working man, who loved his local area and would gladly give up his time to improve it, whenever the chance came along.



Judith, Eddie's daughter, with CEO Julian Woolford and Jeff Sim

Eddie and Mary Turvey joined as members of the Trust over 35 years ago, with Eddie serving as committee member of the SWT Cannock Local Group from 1998, and as Chairman of the group from 2010, even giving up his home to hold committee meetings there.

Eddie and the Cannock group were very active in raising funds for the Trust, taking collecting tins to rattle outside Sainsbury's or Asda, or spending Bank Holidays selling books and jigsaws out of a trailer pulled by Eddie's trusty Land Rover.

It was at one of the midweek volunteer sessions, better known as 'the midweekers', that most of the SWT staff based at the Wolseley Centre got the chance to know Eddie. As part of the midweekers, Eddie was able to get the mix of the things he loved: the outdoors, wildlife, good hard work, cheeky banter and friendship.

Eddie had a remarkable talent of being the one volunteer able to carry the greatest amount of cut hay or reeds on his pitchfork, often taking the form of

a walking haystack as he transported massive amounts of cut material on one go with his pitchfork held aloft in the air!

Eddie, with his good humour and friendly, welcoming attitude meant that midweekers old and new always had a happy time when he was in attendance.

As well as all his volunteering for SWT, Eddie also found time to help out in other ways locally. Known as 'the Sheriff of Shoal Hill', Eddie was for many years the warden of Shoal Hill Common and led monthly heathland management work parties there.

Eddie, with his endless enthusiasm for his neighbourhood and positive attitude towards life, whatever it brought him, set a brilliant example of how to look after your local area and give back to your community. We will all remember him fondly and miss him greatly.

A collection at Eddie's funeral service raised £791.10 in funds which will be used to buy new tools for our practical conservation volunteer groups, which was Eddie's wish.



Summer events summed up

A huge part of our vision is encouraging 1 in 4 people to take action for nature and 1 million people to connect with nature. Our incredible people engagement team work so hard throughout the year to deliver interesting and fun activities, so thousands of children and adults can discover and enjoy nature. Here's a snapshot of our summer events!

- ▶ **100** events run by SWT
- ▶ **2,273** adults and children enjoyed them
- ▶ **220** children went grass sledding at Wolseley
- ▶ **13,200** metres covered by grass sledding
- ▶ **63** pairs of wellies/walking boots joined us on a guided walk
- ▶ **350** mud pies made this summer!

5 Pied flycatcher chicks fledge

Over the past six years the dedicated team of volunteers at Rod Wood Nature Reserve have cleared holly and installed nest boxes, in the hope of attracting pied flycatchers to breed. Males have striking black and white plumage while females are brown and white. This woodland bird has faced major population decline nationwide due to loss of habitat and other pressures, including climate change delivering more extreme weather events along their migratory route from West Africa.

During the springs of 2021 to 2023 pied flycatchers were singing at this reserve but they weren't breeding. Finally, on 30 April 2024 we got the long awaited report that one of the nest boxes was occupied by flycatchers! The nest held five chicks that later fledged. We hope that as adults



Pied flycatchers

they will return to Rod Wood from Africa next spring, and not just to sing. These birds are pretty scarce across the UK with

100 years since last heard!



JAMIE HALL

In 1997 there were only 11 male bitterns left in the UK. Dedicated conservation efforts have brought them back from the brink, with 164 males recorded booming from their reedbed homes in 2017.

Bitterns are one of the country's most secretive birds with plumage that camouflages them incredibly well among the reeds. It's no wonder sightings are scarce but males make an unmistakable sound, a 'boom' which not only helps us know they're present but indicates they're breeding - males 'boom' in spring to attract a female. So you can imagine our excitement when this unearthly but unmistakable sound was heard at Doxey Marshes this spring.

To hear one for yourself, listen to this recording by our friends at Somerset Wildlife Trust. The shrill chirping is a reed bunting adding staccato to the bittern's base!

www.youtube.com/shorts/UsG7j0V2dPA



Welcoming everyone to Wolseley

We've had some exciting changes at The Wolseley Centre this year to help make visiting more accessible. The most noticeable additions are the communication boards, accessible path on park bank, and of course the tipi renovation.

Our communication boards were created by Cauldwell Children. They aim to enable communication for people who are nonverbal, or those who may

have English as an additional language. The boards have a series of pictures representing common words and phrases which may be used when visiting the Centre. One board is situated in the car park and the other is at the entrance to the Learning Hub.

The new path starts at the Learning Hub and leads to the outdoor classroom and tipis. It has a hard surface, and the route has been designed to make the ascent and descent of Park Bank easier to navigate with wheelchairs, buggies, and other mobility aids.

The improvements to our tipi have been funded by National Lottery Awards for All. With this funding, we joined the two tipis together to make one large space and added a wooden floor - the photos show the work in progress, before we closed up the front with a wall and door and sourced accessible furniture. The funding will also enable us to run events in the tipi for people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities - keep an eye out for our events listed online!



Tipis without covers



The new wooden floor

Save the date for City Nature Challenge

Want to be part of a BIG team effort to track the UK's nature? Join the City Nature Challenge in 2025, the perfect way to enjoy spring nature spotting.

It will be our third year taking part and it runs between 25 and 28 April - put it on your calendar! You can record whatever you find: plants, insects, mammals, birds, just as long as it's wildlife. The most recorded species in Staffordshire last year was garlic mustard.

Thank you to everyone who took part in our 2024 effort - 462 of you helped us collectively record 9,905 observations of 1,203 species here in Staffordshire!



Hedge garlic

LIZZIE WILBERFORCE

Caring for curlew on our northern reserves

Roz Lees, Northern Reserves Officer



It's been a really exciting summer for our northern reserves team, who have helped more curlews successfully breed on the moors!

This year they teamed up with the South West Peak Wader Partnership to protect nests on our northern nature reserves from predation. Peak Wildlife Park kindly funded nest protection kits – each included electric fencing, a battery energiser and a trail camera so we could monitor the birds. A dedicated team of volunteers are responsible for surveying land (both farmland and nature reserves) to locate potential breeding pairs,

followed by locating nests and finally setting up the temporary electric fence to protect the nests. This means predators such as badgers and foxes are prevented from eating the eggs, and also protects them from any livestock which may accidentally trample them.

Happily, our Black Brook Nature Reserve nest had two eggs (usually curlews lay up to four), so a small clutch but both successfully hatched and the parent birds remained to raise their chicks.

This fantastic partnership is led by the RSPB, working with farmers, landowners,



Curlew chick

and other nature conservation organisations across the South West Peak District area to survey and monitor breeding wading birds such as curlews, snipe and lapwings. Long term, the partnership aims to work collectively across the South West Peak landscape to improve habitat quality and monitor the success of our wading birds.

Watch our cute trail cam footage and read more here about this partnership work in my blog: bit.ly/caringforcurlews

All images and videos of Curlew nests have been taken by trained staff and volunteers as part of their efforts to protect them. If you are out and about and suspect a Curlew (or any other wild bird) is nesting in the area, you should never approach it and keep as far away as safely possible to minimise risk of disturbance.

Restoring other curlew nesting grounds

We have taken on a lease of 17 hectares of land in the Peak District on which we will be making major improvements for wildlife. This Site of Special Interest is in the catchment of the Blake Brook in the

South West Peak. It was designated for its wet grassland breeding wader community several decades ago, and was once known for lekking black grouse.

Over the next few years we will carry out work to reconnect the brook with its floodplain. We'll replace sheep grazing with cattle, allowing the habitat to be made more suitable for breeding birds such as curlew. These changes will also allow the land to slow the flow of floodwaters, protecting settlements downstream from the more frequent flash floods we are seeing as climate change impacts our weather systems. The land also contains an area of haymeadow, which we will be restoring by bringing in more flowering species from a local species-rich meadow.

Thank you to our volunteers who worked hard to fix the fences this year. We are excited to see how the land progresses over the next few years.



Volunteers survey for curlew

A WILDER Tatenhill Brook

Victoria Bunter, Living
Floodplains Manager

The Tatenhill Brook is a small tributary of the River Trent. We have been making improvements for wildlife in a section of the brook just south of Burton-on-Trent, near to Branston Leas, with the Environment Agency which has funded the work through their Flood Risk Management Scheme.

Through this work, we have improved the river channel habitat along 450 metres of the brook by adding berms. These are natural shelves in rivers which change the flow and create a variety of habitats for the fish and aquatic insects. The flow in this brook was rather sluggish as it has been historically straightened and deepened, so this work has helped the flow to be more dynamic. This in turn helps add more oxygen to the water, making the quality of air in the water better for wildlife that lives there.

We created the berms using a mixture of natural materials including locally sourced river gravels and woody material ranging from smaller brash (twigs and sticks) to thicker logs. These were secured via wooden stakes and biodegradable rope in the short term. We'll replace the rope with living willow whips and canes which will be woven around the wooden stakes for a longer term solution. The beauty of willow is that it will grow as part of the features while they get established. Since introducing the new berms we immediately saw improved flows around them and a variety of fish activity! The addition of this new habitat could help to support aquatic species, such as stone flies and mayflies, within the wider area.

■ To read more about berms and what they do, read my in-depth blog: www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/blog/victoria-bunter/all-about-berms



VICTORIA BUNTER



VICTORIA BUNTER

Stafford Brooks

In July 2024 the work on the ground for Stafford Brooks began, putting all the research, planning, and habitat design to good use.

Over three months our specialist wetland contractors sprang into action to help us commence this crucial conservation while the ground was dry and we could get machinery in safely. During this time, we made 21 new dragonfly ponds, created river bank and wetland habitat, and planted up lowland wildflower meadows across eight sites in Stafford: Radford Meadows Nature Reserve, Riverside Local Nature Reserve, Kingsmead Marsh Local Nature Reserve, Queensville, Kingston Pool Covert South, Former Littleworth Tennis Courts, and Former Bowling Green on Corporation Street.

The shallow river banks we made at Riverside Local Nature Reserve (Fairway) will provide better habitat for young fish to rest in the shallows, feed and breed.

The ponds and wetland habitat we created have variation in their design. This means that when the contractors dug out these areas for water to pool, they did so in a way that would create variety in the topography of the landscape. For example, different depths were added to the ponds, and small islands were made to provide more surface area for floodplain plant life to take hold and birds to nest.

On sites where ponds were made, the spoil (earth) that was dug out was then spread to create areas ready for wildflower seed. All the flowers we planted used locally sourced seed from meadows in Staffordshire. For smaller sites where ponds weren't appropriate, we improved the grassland by harrowing or raking the ground and setting seed to make more lowland wildflower meadows.

While the big work is now finished, the follow up work begins. The funding for this project means we will be able to manage the ecology on each site for several years going forward as the habitats mature. While normal maintenance tasks like fence repairs and bin emptying will continue to be managed by the council on the land that they own, we will specifically be looking at how the biodiversity and ecology improves in



Stafford Brooks
Volunteering Day

these areas, and maintaining the habitat to a good standard.

There's more good news! Thanks to our partners at The Environment Agency, new funding opportunities have arisen for us to do more conservation work in Stafford. This means we can expand on the work already completed for Stafford Brooks and tackle some of the other initial sites which we identified in the research phase, such as Doxey Marshes Nature Reserve.

Keep an eye out on our website for updates on our upcoming work. You can read the latest blog about this project on our website here: www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/blog/christine-harding/stafford-brooks-project-update-its-time-set-seed



Riverside Local Nature
Reserve (Fairway)

Transforming the

Trent Valley



TAM HARRISON

Trent at
Bucknall Park

Transforming the Trent Headwaters

Our work across the city of Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Biddulph Moorlands gathered pace over the summer. This 18 month research phase of the Transforming the Trent Headwaters project, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, is exploring exciting opportunities to benefit local wildlife and communities across the area and the Trent's tributaries. The project is led by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust in partnership with Support Staffordshire and other organisations.

We are mapping the ecological heritage to identify the wildlife sites and species that are flourishing and struggling. We're also identifying historical landscape features and talking to people from all backgrounds to find out what is important to them. We are particularly keen to gain the thoughts and opinions of communities who haven't previously connected with conservation groups.

The information we gather will help shape the project's priorities, and identify organisations and stakeholders willing to share resources. These can include: knowledge, permissions, volunteers, initiatives, funding to develop future projects which benefit wildlife, acknowledging and respecting historical landscape features, and enabling communities. If we're successful in securing further funding our aspiration for the next stage of the project will be to develop and ultimately deliver projects around the Trent Headwaters and tributaries.

If you or your group would like to find out more or take part, please get in touch via email ttv@staffs-wildlife.org.uk, visit www.thetrentvalley.org.uk or follow us on Facebook (@thetrentvalley) or contact Tam, Community and Environment Officer at Support Staffordshire, on Tamsin.harrison@supportstaffordshire.gov.uk

Exploring future River Trent restoration opportunities

The Trust is also investigating how the biodiversity of the River Trent in Stoke-on-Trent can be improved.

Working with Environment Agency provided funds, we're exploring possible opportunities at sections of the river at the Staffordshire University ground, and Ford Green Brook, Ford Green-Chatterley Whitfield. Once we've completed the discovery phase, we'll share plans of the work on our website www.thetrentvalley.org.uk

The benefits of restoring these sections of the river are threefold: it will enhance local biodiversity, improve water quality, and also create a healthier ecosystem, ensuring the river's health for future generations. An important element of the scheme will be working with local residents and organisations to provide educational and recreational opportunities.

Tam and Kath with
Port Vale mascot

TAM HARRISON

Staffordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Meeka Tomey-Alleyne, LNRS Project Manager,
Staffordshire County Council



**Staffordshire &
Stoke-on-Trent**
Local Nature Recovery Partnership

Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council are working together with the Nature Recovery Partnership to deliver the county's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

With input from a wide variety of stakeholders and partners, the LNRS will set out the locations where nature recovery efforts should be focused across the county, having identified the priorities for species, for habitats and for the wider environment.

This is a major partnership effort, bringing together all of the local authorities, statutory agencies such as Natural England, Peak District National Park Authority, farming bodies and other key environmental bodies, including Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. By using the skills and expertise of our partners, it will enable us to create a better, more joined up, LNRS.

How we are identifying priorities

The LNRS has a group governance structure, and each group focuses on delivering a part of the LNRS. The two most important groups are focused on species and habitats.

Creation of the LNRS is made up of many moving parts. A group governance structure means that key people (with various expertise) can collaborate to deliver each part of the LNRS. The two



most important groups are focused on species and habitats.

The species group is working with local experts to identify priority species for the county. The group has also sought input from members of the public via a survey, gathering views on which species they think should be prioritised.

The habitat group will deliver the habitat map. There is a lot of work to be done behind the scenes, including looking at habitat data across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, seeing where different habitats are, the condition of those habitats, and which habitats are rare or lost that we could better support through the LNRS.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust is playing a key role contributing to the LNRS by chairing three of the working groups – the Habitats Group, Mapping Group and Strategy Group.

Why is the LNRS important for Staffordshire?

Nature is in crisis, with one in six species facing extinction. Our wildlife habitats have become fragmented and degraded, pollution, poor air quality and climate change present further challenges. The Government has made legally-binding commitments to reverse the decline of the natural world, for example to manage 30% of land for nature and halt the decline in species populations by 2030. The aim of the LNRS is to provide a baseline and also guide the public, private and voluntary sectors on where and how to focus their nature recovery efforts for greater collective impact in order to meet national environmental targets.

There is a duty on all local authorities to conserve biodiversity. It is anticipated that the LNRS and nature recovery priorities within it, will help inform local planning decisions. Locations that are prioritised for nature recovery within the LNRS will also be incentivised for the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain, a planning policy that requires developers to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was prior to the development.

For more information, visit
www.staffsandstokelnrs.co.uk

Managing over 4,900 acres of land is a gargantuan team effort. Our volunteers are critical to everything we do. The wild spaces under our care are precious fragments of habitat which provide the last remaining strongholds for some really rare wildlife.

This is why it's so important to record and monitor various species at our reserves over long periods of time. We must ensure the way we're managing our land is creating the very best habitats for our priority species. We're actively working to boost these species' populations, or bring them back to Staffordshire through our habitat restoration work.

There are many factors influencing how quickly wildlife comes back. If we take on a site which is very poor for nature, it can take longer to restore a healthy functioning ecosystem. And some really rare species can take a while... For example, this spring, elusive bittern were heard 'booming' at Doxey Marshes for the first time in over 100 years! Let's hope it's a sign of things to come!



Val Riley MBE and John Stanney

Together with our volunteers, we're working to give nature the very best chance. Here some of the team involved share some insight into what they do...

Monitoring the **impact** of our work



JOSEPHINE BEECH

Brilliant botanists Val Riley MBE and John Stanney

It's always exciting to get a call from SWT when they say "There's a bit of land we are looking at and we'd love you to find out what flora and fauna is there..."

Myself and fellow volunteer surveyor John are always eager to explore pastures new, despite 25 years or more of doing so, because you just never know what you might find. So, lenses, binoculars and GPS tracker at the ready, away we go! John and I have surveyed various SWT nature reserves in the Staffordshire Moorlands including Cotton Dell, Thorswood, Weag's Barn, Rod Wood, Black Heath and Casey Bank. Our task is to seek out the rarer species and note their success or decline, which may or may not result in some adjustment to the future management plan.

We are also called upon by private land owners wishing to know more about the flora and fauna on their land, either with a view to entering into a Countryside Stewardship Scheme, or purely to further their management for wildlife. In recent years we have surveyed for several landowners on the periphery of Gun Moor, and it is hoped these land holdings may one day form a wildlife corridor linking Gun Moor to the Roaches. Often what we survey might just be a small field or paddock but very occasionally it turns out to be an Aladdin's cave. So if you see someone dancing around in the middle of a field it'll likely be one of us with a rare find. That's what it's all about!

A talented twitcher – Dominic Collins

I'm a voluntary bird surveyor at the spectacular Roaches reserve on the edge of the Peak District. I've been doing this now for eleven years! I originally got involved after the Trust took over management of the site in 2013 and leapt at the opportunity when they announced they'd be putting together a team to monitor the area's bird life.

The role involves four visits (I cover two) to a 1km square each spring where I record and map evidence of breeding activity for a number of target species associated with moorland and upland habitat. The birds include cuckoo, curlew, skylark, lapwing, stonechat, redstart, pied and spotted flycatchers. By the end of the season you're able to build up a picture of which have held breeding territories – or have actually bred – and where. The Trust is then able to use this information to monitor population trends and to inform its landscape management decisions.

The 'work' itself (it certainly doesn't feel like work!) is immensely pleasurable and rewarding. You get to watch wonderful species in their spring finery going about their yearly breeding rituals. The air is full of their songs and calls. I've enjoyed many memorable sightings, encounters and discoveries over the years. I'll never forget finding my first breeding curlews with three chicks concealed in a rushy tussock, or – at another SWT site I've volunteered at – my first willow tit nest. You get really attached to 'your' square – to its landscape and animal inhabitants.

And all this is set against the spectacular backdrop of the Roaches, or the lovely settings of other SWT reserves. It really is a joy and a privilege to be involved in such valuable monitoring work. Each year, with the first inklings of spring, I look forward to it.

Brankley Pastures benefitting beetles and newts – Will Sheppard

Monitoring of the recently created ponds at Brankley Pastures Nature Reserve has confirmed colonisation by great crested newts, which is fantastic. We also discovered *Dytiscus circumflexus*, a water beetle, for the very first time in Staffordshire!



Will Sheppard



Dominic Collins

Over the last year I've also monitored the oldest habitats here, uncovering another three new species of beetle previously unrecorded in Staffordshire. The ancient and veteran trees here are vital for species which depend on dead and decaying wood, and a lot of these invertebrates are now very scarce. Alongside general survey techniques like sweep netting and beating vegetation, more targeted methods like vane trapping can be used for species which are harder to find. For example, there are species which spend the vast majority of their life within the wood as larvae and only emerge as adults for a couple of days a year. Using these traps has enabled the discovery of *Dorcatoma flavicornis*, *Epiphanius cornutus* and *Eulagius flicornis*, all types of beetles, which have never previously been recorded in the county.

UK UPDATE

Community gardening
with Avon Wildlife Trust

A Success Story: Nature's recovery powered by communities

In two years, the UK-wide Nextdoor Nature project, backed by a £5 million grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, has empowered over 400 communities to restore and enhance nature in their local areas. This achievement far exceeds the original target of engaging 200 local groups, demonstrating the project's impact.

At the heart of Nextdoor Nature is the dedication to equipping individuals and communities with the skills and resources needed to take meaningful environmental action. To achieve this, community organisers were funded in every UK Wildlife Trust, with a focus on reaching communities that have traditionally been excluded from environmental and conservation efforts.

The Nextdoor Nature project has much in common with the grassroots of The Wildlife Trusts movement where passionate local people come together to create positive change for nature. For those who get involved, they also create heart-warming connections, experiences and memories too.

The stories shared here are just a glimpse of what has been achieved through Nextdoor Nature. From a

mental health support group in Durham finding solace in newly accessible gardens, to schools in Kent, the Isles of Scilly, and North Wales engaging in species reintroduction and habitat creation – each success story is a testament to the power of community-driven conservation.

A key measure of Nextdoor Nature's success lies in its sustainability. The project has established connections with other organisations and resources to ensure the continuation of this vital work. Notably, 86% of UK Wildlife Trusts have secured or are actively seeking funding to retain community organisers, ensuring the momentum built during these two years continues to grow.

Thanks to Nextdoor Nature, Wildlife Trusts have made a cultural shift as a movement towards a community organising or 'Team Wilder' approach, that is helping to make environmental conservation project more open and accessible to a diverse range of communities. The legacy of Nextdoor Nature is clear: empowered communities, equipped with the knowledge and passion to protect and restore nature, are now driving lasting environmental change across the UK.

Examples of Nextdoor Nature projects across the UK

- Gwent has trained the Newport community in bee and butterfly surveying, enabling them to contribute valuable data to citizen science initiatives.
- Hertfordshire and Middlesex facilitated AQA accreditation in River Management for eight young people, opening doors to future conservation opportunities.
- In Radnorshire, a thriving grassland and verges group successfully negotiated reduced mowing with the local council, fostering healthier ecosystems.
- Warwickshire inspired local people to take ownership of their green spaces, leading to the independent launch of a Tree Mapping project to address the impacts of ash die-back.
- Gloucestershire supported the Guardians of the River Chelt, helping them move toward becoming a fully autonomous, constituted group.
- Lincolnshire has developed a robust network of Nextdoor Nature Champions who are spreading their conservation message across the county.

UK UPDATE

New report reveals massive carbon stores in UK seabeds

A pioneering series of reports have revealed the vast amount of carbon stored within UK marine habitats, and the importance of protecting UK seas for tackling climate change.

The seas around the UK and Isle of Man cover nearly 885,000 square kilometres – over three times the size of the UK's land mass. This vast area is host to different habitats that sequester and store carbon, known as 'blue carbon'. They include seabed sediments, seagrass meadows, saltmarshes, kelp forests, intertidal seaweed beds, maerl beds and biogenic reefs, such as mussel beds and honeycomb worm reefs.

The Blue Carbon Mapping Project, completed by the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) on behalf of The Wildlife Trusts, WWF and the RSPB, is the first time a country

has provided a comprehensive estimate of the carbon captured and stored in its seas, including within Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

The report finds that 244 million tonnes of organic carbon are stored in just the top 10 centimetres of seabed sediments – principally made of mud – plus coastal habitats including saltmarshes and seagrass beds. The reports identify bottom trawling and offshore energy installation as the biggest potential threats to blue carbon stores.

The Wildlife Trusts, WWF and RSPB are calling on governments across the UK to strengthen protections for the most valuable and vulnerable blue carbon stores.

Find out more at wtru.st/blue-carbon-report



Sir David Attenborough celebrates 60 years with The Wildlife Trusts

Sir David Attenborough has been awarded the Rothschild medal in recognition of the extraordinary leadership, inspiration and indefatigable support he has given to The Wildlife Trusts federation of charities over the past 60 years.

Charles Rothschild founded the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves which would later become The Wildlife Trusts. He was ahead of his time in recognising the need to protect natural habitats and the wildlife that

lived there. His daughter, Miriam, was a visionary scientist who dedicated her life to the natural world.

Sir David Attenborough credits Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust's Tilton Cutting Nature Reserve with giving him his love of the natural world – he would explore it and search for fossils there as a young boy. Since then, Sir David has championed the work of the Wildlife Trusts across the UK for six decades.

UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 Children who changed the world

Manx Wildlife Trust and theatre company, Hello Little People, have launched an audio-immersive wildlife training academy for kids, Let's Get Wild! Wearing silent disco style headphones, 5–9 year-olds move, shake and dance through an action-packed adventure to complete challenges and help save wildlife in the Isle of Man.

wtru.st/LetsGetWild

2 Garden escapers game

North Wales Wildlife Trust is tackling invasive plant species with an innovative new mobile game. Players complete 'missions' on the Crowdsorsa mobile game by locating and recording the garden escapees, along pavements in urban areas or in nature reserves. Players are paid £1 for each new observation of target plants.


wtru.st/GardenEscapers



3 Pink sea fans

Off the Alderney coast, citizen scientists scuba-dive and snorkel for small tissue samples of the pink, warty looking soft corals of pink sea fans. Research by Alderney Wildlife Trust, University of Exeter and Jersey Marine Conservation is assessing their genetic connectivity across the rocky reefs of the Channel Islands.

wtru.st/PinkSeaFans


Rhiane Fatinukun MBE
 @rhianesworld

Finding Your Feet



I am a person who cannot stay still for very long. Hiking and going on adventures are part of my DNA.

Whether it's discovering new corners of the world or right here at home in the UK, getting outdoors is so good for our physical and mental health. Plus, there is so much to see and learn about; we share the planet with so many amazing flora and fauna.

As a child, I would spend time playing outside with my friends at the park, running down alleys to the brook behind my house. We used to go looking for black and white caterpillars and frogs, and we would leave water out for the hedgehogs living in our garden. Sadly, you don't see them anymore, which is one of the reasons I am so excited to be working with The Wildlife Trusts, to find ways to inspire young people to connect with and save nature. Hopefully, we can bring our spiky friends back from the brink.

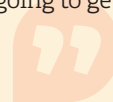
In school, I always enjoyed spending time outdoors doing sports: cross-country running, rounders and netball. But when I started work, I lost that connection to the outdoors and nature. This is something I hear from people all over the UK – they are desperate to connect with the environment but not sure how. That used to be me.

If you live in an urban area, it's hard to find like-minded people who want to experience the outdoors. When you do find groups, most people are white. It's not that those groups are all unwelcoming to a Black woman, it's just that there are shared cultural experiences that only Black women experience. I find strength, security and bonding in those situations.

But we needed to challenge stereotypes in outdoor adventure and within our community. So, I started Black Girls Hike, a small weekly meet-up group of nine or 10 people so that we were among like-minded and non-judgmental people. BGH is owned by the members, and collectively we challenge the norms and break down barriers for future generations. Now Black Girls Hike is a multi-award-winning national organisation with tens of thousands of members.

I love exploring different terrains, from mountains, hills and forests to coastal walks. I absolutely love the Peak District. I took Clare Balding there for the first time, which is really strange because she has been to loads and loads of places. I remember thinking that's like when people say they've never seen Sister Act or Dirty Dancing. But my favourite walk is from Robin Hood's Bay to Ravenscar in Yorkshire. It is so beautiful.

My top tip: a waterproof jacket is essential. But when I get my foam sit mat out, people often say, 'Oh, that's so handy, I'm going to get one of those.'



The Wildlife Trusts believe that everyone should have the opportunity to experience the joy of wildlife in their daily lives and are committed to putting equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of our movement. Find out more about our Wild About Inclusion approach, which includes ensuring more people from across society have better access to nature.


wildlifetrusts.org/commitment-to-edu


CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE

Your Wildlife Trust is part of a movement of 46 Wildlife Trusts across the UK, Alderney and Isle of Man – so whether you're looking for a local stroll or setting off from home in search of a serious hike, The Wildlife Trusts have lots of great suggestions of walks to take:

wildlifetrusts.org/visit/choose-your-adventure

Rhiane Fatinukun MBE shares how her desire to reconnect with nature led her to become a globetrotting hiker, adventurer and founder of the UK's largest outdoor collective, Black Girls Hike, dedicated to empowering Black women and girls to explore the great outdoors.



Behind the Badger:

Martin Adams, Facilities Manager

Martin Adams is Facilities Manager for SWT and has worked for the Trust for over 30 years! He's a fount of knowledge and an unsung hero who has supported the Trust in innumerable ways over the years. This December, he's taking his well-earned retirement. But before we bid him a fond farewell, we simply had to interview him... to hear all his secrets! Thank you Martin, for your work over the years and dedication to Staffordshire's wildlife.

So Martin, what's your role in a nutshell?

Erm... Well, I've had so many that I've lost count! My last role as Facilities Manager includes responsibility for premises, vehicles, utilities, IT and the like. I think the only one of those that has carried across the 32/38 years I've worked here has been IT - yes, it did exist back then!

How did you end up working for SWT?

Being unemployed in the mid '80s wasn't fun. An unemployment rate of 13.8% made UB40s 'One in Ten' seem tame. So my first experience with the Trust was on a Manpower Services Commission scheme 1985/6, working as part of a county-wide nature reserves team. I liked

Martin at Calanais,
Outer Hebrides



nature, wildlife, and the outdoors, so it seemed to fit and, weirdly, I enjoyed it.

I managed to maintain a volunteer role afterwards that encompassed botanical survey work, general office tasks and, yes, IT. Then in 1992, when the Trust was the recipient of two game-changing legacies, I got a job as Administrative Assistant.

The title doesn't really do the role justice because, with only four employees, there were many roles to fill under that title.

Tell us about an unforgettable nature experience

Watching otters along the southern shore of the Isle of Mull springs to mind, but there are quite a lot in the memory bank when you reach my age!

What's your favourite species?

My favourites are relatively common stuff that's accessible to all. From a young age I was a bit of a birdwatcher, primarily along Scottish coasts and then an interest in the flowers around me (as I sat and watched the birds) developed. Other things followed on from there.

We're noticing a theme... Do you like to visit Scotland a lot?

Yes, I enjoy visiting and have enjoyed at least 120 self-catering holidays in Scotland. When I retire I am looking forward to spending much more time there!

Fun fact:

I've spent 30 years as a vegetarian but I don't like vegetables!



Skye from
Applecross
Peninsular

LOCAL GROUPS



Volunteers John and Sue installing steps on a steep section at Badger Wood.

Burton and District Local Group

Here in Burton, we have been following our usual format of monthly talks, punctuated by two walks over the summer. I led one covering the development of the National Forest and the second nature/mindfulness walk was led by Lynn Pickering at Burton Queen's Hospital. Our sister organisation, Burton Conservation Volunteers have been making Badger Wood at the rear of the hospital more accessible, for both locals and hospital users, as well as enhancing its biodiversity.

This work has been funded by the Rural Community Council (Leicestershire and Rutland) on behalf of the National Forest.

Leek Local Group

Our last talk in spring was on barn owls and was sponsored by The Natural Oak Company. We attended the Leek Green Arts Festival in June which had a strong political presence just before the General Election. Sales of plants at Meerbrook Plant Fayre and the Foxlowe raised £444.



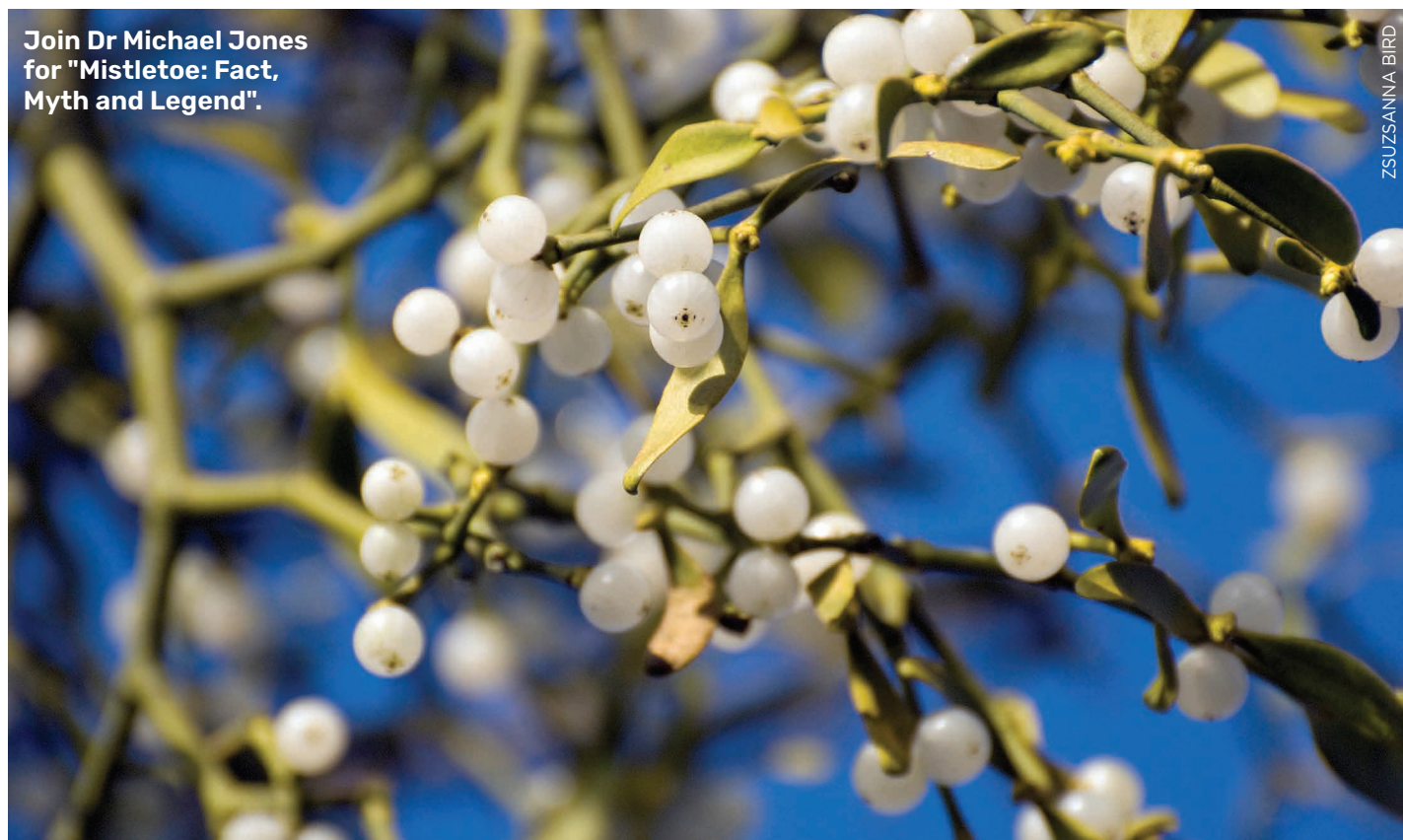
Rod Wood Reserve recorded its first ever pair of nesting pied flycatchers

This year, Rod Wood Reserve celebrated its first ever pair of nesting pied flycatchers, a fitting culmination to all the management work carried out over the last few years to attract them. Both Swineholes Wood and Rod Wood have seen a goshawk visiting in late summer.

Our reserve work -parties on both sites have been active throughout the summer months, aided by occasional visits by the northern work -party team, with survey work on land nearby to Knotbury highlighting a number of rare plants.

Join Dr Michael Jones
for "Mistletoe: Fact,
Myth and Legend".

ZSUZSANNA BIRD



Lichfield Local Group

This year has continued the rebound from covid with attendances filling Wade Street Church Hall and outdoor events becoming an exercise in crowd control. In addition, the committee has welcomed two new members, Jane Arnold and Zina Pickering.

The winter programme continues on 3 December with a talk by Ron Rock who will be telling us all about mining bees. The popular New Year bird walk will take place at 10am on 4 January at Tucklesholme Nature Reserve, led by Colin Beresford. At 7.45pm on Tuesday 4 February we will welcome back Dr Peter Thomas to Wade Street Church Hall for a

talk about why trees are so important. On Tuesday 4 March we have a talk by Alice Dytham of ARD Birds of Prey: A Hands-on Falconry Experience.

North West Local Group

The North West Local Group enjoyed some excellent illustrated talks last winter, which were all well attended. There have been no meetings during

the summer, but we resumed our events in September. We alternate our talks between Maer Village Hall and Eccleshall Parish Room, organising evening talks over the six months covering the winter period, with three meetings at Eccleshall and three at Maer. On Friday 29 November there will be an illustrated talk by Dr Michael Jones, "Mistletoe: Fact, Myth and Legend" at Maer Village Hall (ST5 5EF) at 7.30pm. No need to book – just turn up.

RON ROCK



JOHN BRIDGES



Natural Connections

Exploring religious and spiritual connections to a natural world in crisis

Some days it feels like we are in a desperate scramble to respond to the challenge of species and habitat loss, as well as an intensifying climate emergency. One upside of our experience of the sharpness of urgency has been a broadening in the category of environmentalism. Now it includes new or previously marginalised stakeholders and overlooked forms of care for nature.

As a general rule, sustainability has tended towards a default of elite, white, secular and scientific. In the research I was involved in last year on project Spotlight*, we identified a massive upswell of enthusiasm for environmental care and action among people of colour in the UK. A significant number of our respondents also linked their concerns to religious and spiritual traditions and identities.

These findings supported work I've done alongside everyday activists and environmentalists, where I've seen an exciting range of new initiatives coming up in the context of religious communities. This includes the Sikh Guru Nanak Sacred Forest project, aiming to establish a new network of sacred forests across the world. British Muslims are drawing on the Quran and Hadith to reclaim forms of thoughtful stewardship of nature.

This can also be seen in urban ecology projects: British Bahu Trust mosques are covered with solar panels and proactive in leading community clean-ups. Cambridge Central mosque is a true eco-mosque with a near-zero carbon footprint. The Eco-Church network, has grown from 250 to more than 5,000 British churches in a decade, making it one of the largest community networks of local environmental action groups in the UK.

Woodlands, nature reserves, and other non-religious environmental charities are also connecting with their stakeholders in more holistic ways. Given that so much of our work restoring the landscapes we care about is about re-establishing forms of connection, it makes

sense that many people are re-discovering their own environmentalism in the context of personal faith and spirituality.

But while conservation as a genre is opening up, there is still a lot of work to do. Are there aspects of ourselves that we still hold back and fence off from our concerns for wildlife? For example, the natterjack toad, hazel dormouse and hedgehog are all under threat of extinction. We might try to stretch our awareness to bring creativity to forms of love for creatures that we might find unlovely or pause to learn about new kinds of beauty.

By bringing spirituality to nature it can also help us navigate feelings of loss and disconnection, like the process of mourning a lost-through-melting Icelandic glacier. This might take the form of a slow walk, drawing close and leaning in to nature, even though we may want to flee for fear of grief. Why not treat walking footpaths, hills or the spectacular but fragile British peatlands as an eco-pilgrimage?

It's especially exciting to me that we are finally bringing spirituality to nature conservation as this can help us to forge deeper relationships, harmony and forms of connection with habitats and creatures.

*Project Spotlight is an initiative engaging people of colour with nature and climate change. You can learn more about the project at climateexperiences.org

This article by Jeremy Kidwell precedes an upcoming blog series by The Wildlife Trusts exploring the intersection of nature conservation and climate change, religious faiths and spirituality. Starting towards the end of 2024, each blog will focus on religious festivals or awareness days that highlight diverse spiritual perspectives on the natural world. View all blogs from The Wildlife Trusts at wildlifetrusts.org/blog



Jeremy Kidwell is an associate professor in theology at the University of Birmingham. He is the author or editor of a range of books including most recently a collection of essays edited with Stefan Skrimshire called *Religion and Extinction*.



Fruit trees are **fantastic**

Ecology, conservation and wildlife gardening teacher, **Paul Ritchie**, shares his most loved garden fruit trees that offer a bounty of flowers, berries and fruits. These eight trees will boost wildlife in any garden, while offering treats for your winter kitchen store.

Fruit trees are fantastic for wildlife and a great way of making space for nature in gardens. Wild fruit trees offer homes for numerous insects at all stages of their lives, nesting birds and small mammals such as bats. Vitally they also provide year-round food: blossom is nectar for wild bees emerging from hibernation, leaves and the fruit feed moth caterpillars.

Fruit trees in blossom are beautiful but they have a broader benefit for the natural environment and for people too. They improve soil quality, filter the air and slow water run-off which reduces flooding, as well as providing shade in hot weather and lessening noise pollution. I plant native hedgerows to provide wind breaks and shelter for wildlife such as hedgehogs and house sparrows.

Choosing a tree

You do not need a big garden to grow fruit trees and some smaller varieties will grow happily in pots.

When I am choosing the right tree for the right place I always consider:

Height: The mature size should be appropriate for the available space. Especially important if there are buildings, telephone cables or powerlines nearby.

Shape: The average dimensions of the tree's canopy spread will affect shading and space so slender trees such as rowan are ideal for smaller gardens.

Soil: Check the label when buying a tree for its hardiness to drought and preference of soil type to match with your garden e.g. clay, chalky, sandy or loam soils.

I suggest buying trees as bare-root whips to plant in winter, but potted trees can be planted all year in square holes. Remember that fruit trees can be pruned to suit your own garden and needs.



Paul Ritchie is a biologist, passionate about trees, outdoor learning and connecting people with nature. He has worked for City of London Open Spaces, Surrey Wildlife Trust and now teaches at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and RHS Garden Wisley.



1



Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) or 'Lady of the Mountains' produces large clusters of scarlet berries loved by redwing and fieldfare and used as a sugar substitute for diabetics.

For more information and advice on planting fruit trees in your garden, visit mycoronationgarden.org

2



Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) or 'Mayflower' supports hundreds of different insects, and its berries can be used to make ketchup, chutney, jam and beverages.

3



Crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*) has small apples loved by hedgehogs, mice, voles, fox and deer and, if cooked, as jelly, chutney, cordial or brewed as cider, is enjoyed by humans too.

4



Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) we use the clusters of creamy flowers and black berries to brew cordials, champagne and wine, whilst the berries are loved by thrushes and blackbirds.

5



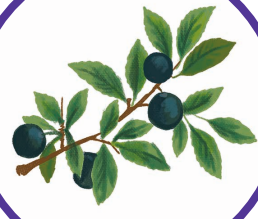
Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) has evergreen leaves that are slow to break down, so hedgehogs, small mammals, toads and slow worm hibernate in the leaf litter under the tree.

6



Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*) has fruit suitable for making jams, puddings, chutneys, soups, vinegar, cordials, wine and beer.

7



Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) is culturally linked with Halloween and, like many wild fruits, sloe berries have medicinal uses as well as being used to flavour gin.

8



Wild plum (*Prunus insititia*) or bullace grows in hedgerows and, whilst smaller and less sweet than domestic plums, it can be stewed to make fruit preserves.



MY YOUNG WILD LIFE

SUE KNEILL-BOXLEY

Hello, I'm Laura, a 22-year old with a passion and love for nature.

Nature has always been a part of my life. However, over the last five years my involvement with my local community and nature has played an important role in my mental health recovery. Whether I am walking through woodlands and identifying insects, or volunteering with a local wild project, I find that spending time in nature helps me to have more hope about the planet's future, and my own.

I recently began volunteering on a Nextdoor Nature project in Stafford, where local residents got together to transform a once disused, neglected patch of land into a beautiful garden. I've found this process so inspiring as I have been able to see it through from start to finish. To witness such an impressive physical change has been motivating for me. Coming together with lots of other residents, charities and businesses from the local area, has made me realise how many like-minded people there are in my community who all want to see positive

change. I've found that volunteering on this project has exposed me to working more in group settings, with new people, which as an autistic person is something I've always struggled with.

However, I discovered that by being outside in nature, getting in touch with my creative side, and being around others who have similar interests, has made this process easier and more accessible for me. Our garden is now open to the public, and I am looking forward to helping out with the maintenance of it, and

contributing more ideas to continue to improve it for both nature and people.

I also enjoy helping out with my partner at a community garden in Stafford every couple of weeks. I am a beginner gardener, so I love being able to learn from the other volunteers there. This year, we helped to sow a small wildflower meadow on a former patch of grass, and have learned how to cultivate leeks, cauliflowers, and potatoes. More than anything, I love spotting the wildlife that visits the garden. Our new wildflower patch has attracted lots of different bees, meadow brown butterflies, and a range of native ladybirds.

Last year, I participated in the Wilder Youth project run by the Trust. Through this I was supported to come up with

my own 'wild' project. I wanted to make a positive physical impact in my community, particularly something that would improve the urban landscape and benefit pollinators. My idea was to try and get the first 'living roof' bee-friendly bus shelter installed in Staffordshire. After some research, I found that these shelters were already dotted around the country and benefit the local environment in a number of ways: they support our native bees and butterflies by providing vital links between urban parks and gardens and support native wildflower populations.

After creating a petition, designing posters and leaflets, sharing on social media, reaching out to local news stations, and communicating with Staffordshire County Council, I am very



RACHEL SCOPES



SUE KNEILL-BOXLEY



LAURA GERARD

close to achieving my goal! Look out for a living roof bus shelter in Stafford town, coming soon hopefully! I'm so grateful to the Wilder Youth leaders, without whom I wouldn't have had the confidence to start my own project. Having been through this process, I feel that I now have the self-belief and self-confidence to tackle a future project on my own.

The great thing about nature is that you can take what you need in the moment - peace, creativity, clarity, community, hope - and give back to it when you can. Five years ago, I attended a therapy farm, where being in the open air next to wildflower fields and creating art using natural materials, helped me to continue. My mental health recovery is still ongoing, but it's so cool that I am now at a place in my life where I have begun to contribute back to nature, through interacting with my community, volunteering and even carrying out my own wild projects. I want to keep protecting and restoring wild spaces so that others can enjoy them and find hope in nature too.

Remembering
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
in your will is a gift that
will nurture wildlife for
generations to come



PETER CAIRNES

We have a number of solicitors around the county who offer 15% discount on will-writing services to Staffordshire Wildlife Trust supporters

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Eric Whitehead Partnership

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Contact Sonia Consearo
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For more information on leaving a gift to Staffordshire's wildlife in your will, please contact Sarah Collier at: legacies@staffs-wildlife.org.uk.

