



WildTimes



Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust

Hi everyone,

Time certainly flies when having fun! I cannot believe how fast this year has gone; and what a year it has been, so many volunteer hours donated and such a variety of tasks achieved. As always we cannot thank you enough, without your hard work our reserves would be very much unloved.



Recently the weather has been a touch challenging, so much rain that reserves are underwater and sometimes the roads have made them unreachable. From an environmental view it was much needed - groundwater levels were low and although authorities weren't proclaiming drought there was room for replenishment. As I write there's clear and crisp weather and I feel my face warmed by the sun; it makes quite a difference and feels more like it should as we enter December. With all the rain it has been a great year for fungi - what wonderful specimens they are, so fragile and yet so resilient.

In this edition of WildTimes you will find a round up of the year, our achievements as a Trust, a round up of news and a repetition of thanks.

A personal thank you to start with; this, as some of you will know, is my last WildTimes. My first was in September 2015 and I was just here as a one-year placement to set me off on a magical journey into the conservation sector. Now, four years and around 16 editions later, that journey continues as I leave the Trust. My role was to support the other officers but I think I got the best deal, working on all the reserves across the county it has been a fantastic time for me. I have worked alongside many of you at work parties and every minute on reserves has filled me with joy. Every day has been filled with learning, sharing knowledge and experiences and I will always look back with fondness.

Thank you all so much for bringing enjoyment to my job and making it as perfect as it has been.

Have a wonderful festive period,

Best wishes, *Helen D*

New look!

Practical Conservation Calendar [winter now available on our website](#)

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An end of year round-up

Colin Raven, WWT Director;



What makes Worcestershire Wildlife Trust so special? Our fantastic volunteers! Volunteering is vital to everything we do – conservation tasks, office work, local groups, education, events, surveys, governance, fundraising; in fact, every aspect of the Trust's work. Just as importantly, your commitment and hard work is an inspiration to others, not least for the staff when we come to work every day.

I would like to thank you on behalf of the Trust and its work. Every one of you is making a real difference and, as we come to the end of 2019, I would like to share just a few recent achievements that you have helped to make possible.

Through the year we have campaigned for an Environment Act that will deliver a Nature Recovery Network across the UK, providing huge benefits for wildlife whilst substantially contributing to climate change mitigation. A draft bill was prepared that included ambitions to deliver such a radical approach although we were concerned that the legislative and funding commitments that would be required to ensure this was delivered were too weak. More recently, parliament has been focussed on other (albeit related) issues, which has meant that the legislation has been delayed, so we must continue to press our MPs.

In March, we concluded our 50th Anniversary Year, the focus for which had been to reach out to new audiences – schools, colleges, businesses, groups, communities and landowners - through a wide range of projects and programmes. Thanks to this we have been able to engage with more people than ever before, especially young people and communities in the county's towns and city. If we are to be successful in our mission of building a Nature Recovery Network, we have a lead role in bringing nature to a broader range of people's lives. Even though our membership continues to grow we still need many more supporters, advocates and ambassadors for wildlife.

Thanks to several years of substantial legacy receipts we have been able to commit to several significant nature reserve acquisitions. We are now in the middle of our biggest ever fundraising campaign for the first of these, Dropping Well Farm near Kidderminster, and there are two more substantial parcels of land for which negotiations are ongoing. Acquisitions are only agreed if they meet the rigorous criteria of the Trust's Reserve Acquisition Policy and for every one that does come to fruition there are usually dozens that do not make it – we only act when we are sure that our ownership will make a real difference.

Where better to conclude than Volunteer Development. Two years ago, Emma Wurmli joined us as Volunteer Development Officer, working alongside Helen Dorey who leads on volunteering on nature reserves. The brief was to implement the main findings of an independent review of volunteering, based on a survey of volunteers, and these targets have now been achieved. Based upon this success, the trustees have now agreed additional funding for a further three years where the priorities will be: building the bonds with and between volunteers; increasing diversity within volunteers; developing volunteer leaders; building a team of volunteers for engagement work; running a volunteer internship scheme; upskilling staff and volunteers in management and support for volunteers. This commitment reflects the value that we as a Trust place on volunteering.

We look forward to working with you all next year - here's to 2020!

Colin

Northern Reserves Round-up

Andy Harris Northern Reserves Officer

Thank you every person that has helped out on the reserves, whether wardening, running work parties, helping on site or carrying out other jobs like monitoring.

The wet weather has caused delays and even prevented some annual work like hay cuts, grazing, scrub clearance on wetlands and forestry work. We have taken on management of Dropping Well Farm, adjacent to The Devil's Spittleful, and in February will commence farming. We will be increasing activity levels through volunteers, livestock and contractors to keep our larger 'open' sites (marshes/heaths/grasslands) open. This will include help from the probation service, Kidderminster College and the University of Worcester.

New: Northern Reserves Volunteer Group

This new volunteer group will mainly focus on our nature reserves in the Wyre area around Bewdley, Stourport and Kidderminster.

The sessions will not be programmed too far in advance, allowing us the flexibility to carry out seasonal jobs and be more able to react to events as they occur on our reserves.

In contrast to the Roving Volunteer Group, this new monthly Wednesday volunteer group will not be running from Lower Smite Farm (no lifts/minibus will be operating) but rather volunteers in the north of Worcestershire will be able to meet at the reserves to avoid the need to drive too far.

We have trialled a few of these sessions over autumn. Our first season has included clearing overhanging branches from a trackway, clearing a wildflower bank of brambles and small oak at Pound Green Common and opening up the new orchard and parking area we now have at Bewdley Meadow.

Next season might include tree work at Bishop's Field (if the bog freezes), removing birches from the heath (which will feed the giraffes at West Midlands Safari Park) and work on the Helen Mackaness reserve.

2020 task days: 15th Jan, 19th Feb and 18th March

If you would like to be added to our list of people interested in this group please contact us at volunteer@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org or 01905 754 919.

Thank you to those who have helped already.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas!



© Andy Harris

Ticks and Lyme Disease Reminder

For all of you that spend time out and about enjoying our wild places - whether out walking or helping on volunteer work parties, it is a good idea to refresh yourself with best practice around how to deal with ticks and the symptoms of Lyme Disease (which although rare, can be fatal). It is good practice to check for ticks after every session outdoors.

Public Health England have created a simple poster and lots more information can be found by **searching 'ticks' and 'lyme disease'** on these sites:

www.gov.uk and www.nhs.uk

Enjoy the outdoors but 'be tick aware'

- ticks can transmit microbes that cause infections such as Lyme disease
- you could be exposed to ticks whenever you spend time outdoors, including when in your garden or the local park
- ticks mainly attach to animals, but sometimes they may bite you or your family
- you can prevent tick bites by walking on clearly defined paths, using insect repellent and performing **regular tick checks**
- some tick bites can result in infection, so it is important to remove ticks safely and as quickly as possible
- the safest way to remove a tick is by using a pair of **fine-tipped** tweezers or a tick removal tool
- **contact your GP or dial NHS 111 promptly if you begin to feel unwell with flu-like symptoms or develop a spreading circular red rash. Remember to tell them you were bitten by a tick or have recently spent time outdoors**

Scale compared to a one-penny coin

Tick in the environment | Tick attached to skin | Lyme disease bullseye rash | Tick found under hair

For more information, search for the phrases 'ticks' and 'Lyme disease' on these websites: www.nhs.uk www.gov.uk

Western Reserves Round-up

Dom Cragg, Western Reserves Officer

After having endured a lot of water over this very wet autumn, the beautifully cold, sunny days that we've been treated to over the last week are certainly much appreciated. From the reserves office window, the sunsets at this time of year can be stunning, particularly with the Granary in the foreground.



© Hannah Thomas

September saw autumn dormouse surveys taking place at a number of our nature reserves, with particularly good numbers found at Blackhouse Wood and Hunthouse Wood. It seems to have been a bountiful year for fruits, nuts and seeds, which will have helped the dormice reach their hibernation weights before the weather turned colder. It's always pleasing to find a box full of dormice but even more so when you can learn something new. At Blackhouse Wood, a particular family of dormice had been quite resourceful and instead of using deciduous leaves to surround their woven nest, had used sprigs of yew. This isn't something I'd seen before (possibly because there aren't too many woodlands with yew thickets in Worcestershire?) and sharing it with local dormouse experts, it seems to be new to them too. It makes total sense though – why travel further to get oak leaves if you've got something else on your doorstep?!



At Blackhouse Wood, Piddle Brook Meadows and Monkwood © Dom Cragg



October brought with it fungal fruiting bodies erupting seemingly everywhere you looked. Across our woodlands and meadows, there were colourful fungi, drifts of fungi, miniature fungi and fungi easy to overlook – all of which was fascinating to me as a complete beginner to the mycology world!

So to November, where we are two months into our workplans for volunteer groups at Monkwood, Trench Wood, Blackhouse Wood and The Knapp & Papermill. Tasks completed include hedge-laying at the Knapp, scallop creation at Monkwood, tree planting at Trench and coppicing at Blackhouse. All sites have been exceptionally wet and muddy, so many thanks to our intrepid teams of volunteers for battling on!

The roving volunteers have been out doing much the same and it certainly makes a difference. The flower-rich verges along paths that were slowly being shaded out by coppiced hazel suddenly have the light they need to thrive and provide nectar to insects after re-coppicing. Large scallops cut this winter will create warm, sheltered pockets in summer, which are just the places that early-rising butterflies and bees can warm up on a summers day. The trees planted at Trench Wood have introduced a lot more diversity to an area of the woodland that was dominated by just a handful of species and will bring with them spring flowers and autumn berries to increase foraging opportunities for our local woodland wildlife.

There's just enough space for me to thank all of you once again for your fantastic efforts over this year. We say it time and again but it really is the case that without you, our reserves wouldn't be the rich, diverse places they are for wildlife. Have a lovely Christmas and we still have the other half of winter when we come back in January, so plenty of time to do more planting, cutting and creating!

Southern Reserves Round-up

David Molloy, Southern Reserves Officer

Water, water and more water! That pretty much sums up the theme for the southern reserves over the past few months. The above average rainfall has caused a significant amount of disruption for local communities but for a few of our nature reserves it has been a long-awaited relief. Wetland reserves such as Hill Court Farm and Gwen Finch suffered from the long, dry summer of 2018 and it is only with the recent, sustained deluge that we have



begun to see these sites recover to their optimal condition. The floodwaters at Hill Court Farm have attracted hundreds of waterfowl including pintail, teal, wigeon and shovelers. The reserve and the surrounding landscape are really buzzing with life at the moment, which is fantastic to see!

My favourite recent experience at Hill Court Farm, however, was a dusk time encounter with a barn owl. There I was, wandering through the wide-open fields, listening the cacophony of a nearby starling flock, as the afternoon light slowly faded. As I approached the end of the field I looked up and spotted a bright white barn owl in the nearby hedge, eyes focused intently on me. It was a captivating moment. There we stayed for the next 20 seconds, looking directly at one another, pondering our next course of action (I can't speak for the owl but it seemed like the type that was capable of pondering). In the end it got bored and flew off to find something more amenable to being eaten.



In other news, our four-legged, woolly lawn mowers have been doing a fantastic job at Windmill Hill for the past six weeks. Trying to keep on top of the dominant grasses on this reserve has been a persistent problem due to the steep gradient of the slope, making a hay cut not a viable option. This year, however, we have managed to graze the site with both cattle and sheep, which has really helped to lower the sward height. The proof is in the pudding but hopefully over the next couple of years we will begin to see an improved abundance and diversity of wildflowers across the entire reserve.

Winter works have been begun at Hollybed Farm Meadows where the local work party have been embracing the traditional art of hedge-laying. While the process of laying a hedge can seem fairly brutal to the trees (80% of the stem is cut away), this kind of disturbance actually stimulates a growth spurt in the trees, which then creates a denser, fuller, healthier hedge. Well maintained hedgerows such as this provide connectivity for wildlife across our countryside. They are also important habitats and food sources for birds and insects.

Finally, thank you to everyone that has been involved on the southern reserves over the past 12 months. Whether it has been through volunteer work parties, surveying and monitoring or just an occasional email to tell us about the wild and weird things you've seen out on the reserves, your contribution is vital to helping us to maintain these special places for nature.

Merry Christmas!



Eastern Reserves Round-up

Eleanor Reast, Eastern Reserves Officer

The big news on the eastern side of the county is that the restoration work over on the Hen Brook at Upton Warren has now been completed! We've created a shallow scrape alongside the brook to give extra feeding areas for birds like snipe and lapwing. The pool in front of the Hen Brook hide has been opened up using amphibious diggers. Even whilst they were busy noisily moving back and forth across the pool a Cetti's Warbler was blasting



its explosive call from right beside the hide.



The day after the work had finished I spent an early morning sat in the Hen Brook hide watching a kingfisher dart from one side of the pool to the other whilst moorhens fed on the discarded roots of the reeds.



We've also dredged the Hen Brook and reprofiled the edges to make it less uniform and better for wildlife. (These photos show before and after the work).

October is one of my favourite months as we see some spectacular fungi out in the woods. I found this porcelain fungi in the beech trees at Piper's Hill. However, October can be a very muddy month...well at least at Ipsley where Tom and Chris were properly initiated to the reserve when they ended up knee-deep with their brushcutters in a mud bath!



Unfortunately we don't have any photographic evidence of Carl who, having laughed at them, ended up losing his boot in the very same quagmire! We'll leave that to your imagination!

Finally, such a big festive thank you to all of you for helping us on our reserves and doing it with such enthusiasm and jollity...or at least being easily bribed with biscuits! Sometimes the wildlife comes out to watch over us as we, unbeknownst to them, enhance their homes. So I'll leave you with this photo of Mark being eyed up by a frog at Foster's Green....



Photos © Eleanor Reast

Bird Notes from Lower Smite Farm

Steve Bloomfield, Senior Conservation Officer

There's a rather 'end-of-year' feeling outside today. Gloomy but fairly mild weather coupled with occasional redwing and fieldfare calls from the orchard tell us that another birding year is almost over. It's been a good season, though, and total numbers of scarce passage migrants at the farm were healthy compared to recent times with 36 individuals of seven of the monitored species turning up across the year.

That we get such good numbers of these birds (species like wheatear, whinchat, tree pipit and redstart) is testament to the careful management of the farm and our ongoing attempts to improve it for wildlife. Sensitive management of hedges and margins are clearly showing benefits for breeding birds too. Insect-eating species like whitethroat, which had another strong season here this year (14 territories), and chiffchaff (15 territories), are all benefitting from our management. Volunteers, and especially the Smite Farm group, have helped create better nesting opportunities, planting hundreds of metres of new hedging and coppicing or laying other sections to diversify hedge structure and maximise species diversity. The 'smelly bottoms' planting, designed to add wildflowers to the hedge bases has also been successful and, of course, with more flowers come more insects and so more food for the birds!

Speaking of feeding, it's at this time of year that our wild bird cover crops really come into their own. Finch numbers built up quite early in the autumn this year with well over 100 goldfinches using 'bumble-bird' crops right through to the end of October. Other species have now joined in and on most days we can find small parties of chaffinches, linnets, greenfinches and reed buntings seeking out seeds across the farm. As these get eaten the 'natural' food supply dwindles and so we put out extra food (around a tonne of mixed seeds across the winter) to top up the remaining resource. Again the volunteers play a key role, distributing seeds to our feeders and fields in all weathers.

It'll be obvious by now that the volunteer efforts here are showing real benefits for wildlife so, as someone who gets to enjoy the farm regularly, a big thank you from me (and the birds) to all those involved. Hopefully next year will bring more good news for the wildlife at Smite.

I'll keep you posted.

Steve



Recent highlights

Stonechat – First recorded on 17/9 with two-four present thereafter

Meadow Pipit – 107 over the farm in one hour 18/9 (largest hour-count of autumn)

House martin – last recorded on 3/10

Swallow – Last recorded on 9/10

Green sandpiper – One over the orchard 9/10

Redwing – First night-time passage bird calling overhead 11/10

Tawny owl (scarce at the farm) – One on 27/10

Fieldfare – Five in the yard 29/10 (probably the first of the autumn here)

What came before the Wildlife Trust: History of our Reserves

Andy Harris, Northern Reserves Officer

Every one of our reserves has a unique history. From geological and landscape history or our early ancestors and giant herbivores, to the time when technological innovations impacted on our sites, whether it be the bronze or iron age or the more recent agricultural and industrial revolutions, there are so many stories to tell.

Some of this history has already been delved into and sits with local historical societies or is in universities, libraries or peoples' heads. Some is filed away in 50 years' worth of archives, old magazines and files here at Lower Smite Farm.

The history of our reserves is often interesting but is it really of use? The simple answer is 'yes' and here are a few reasons why...

Black Meadow, Chaddesley Woods

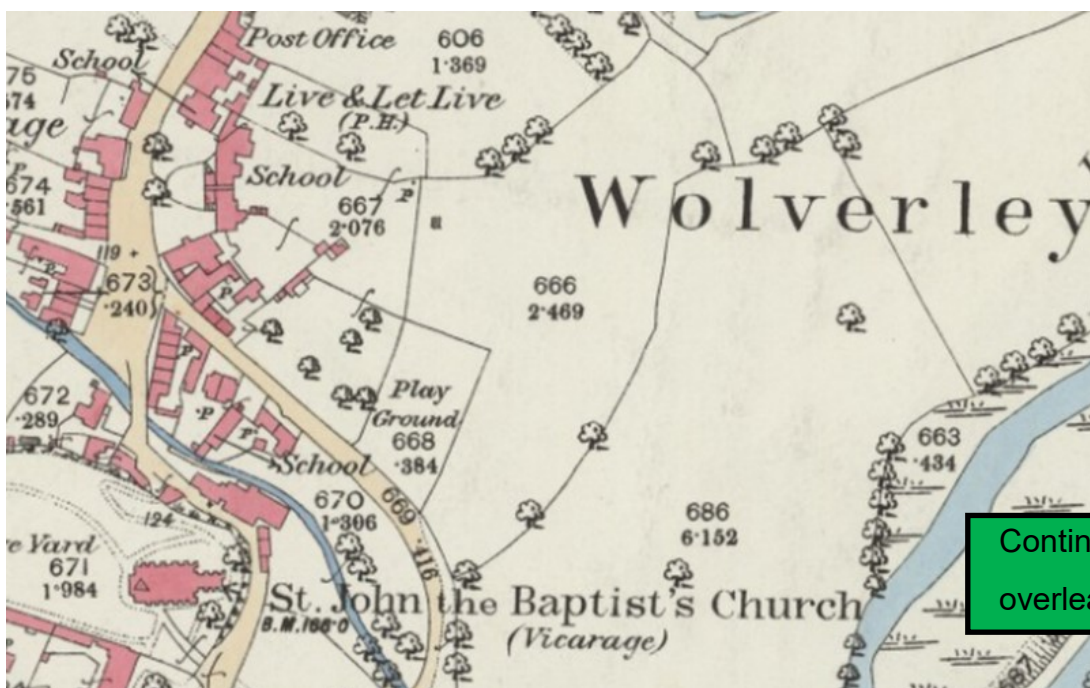
A University of Birmingham student researched the boundaries of Black Meadow and by comparing the newer fence lines with the historic boundary, they were able to demonstrate that one hectare of meadow had vanished. This had come about as it is easier to build new fences within a field; over successful rebuilds, including under Trust management, the meadow size had reduced in area. We successfully sought funding and moved the fencing back to the historic boundary, restoring one hectare of species-rich grassland in the process.

The Devil's Spittleful

We and local archaeologists were unsure why there was a manmade ditch around the Spittleful rock. Victorian maps, which are known to be accurately drawn by cartographers, prove that the Spittleful was an open landscape in the 19th century. A Victorian natural history book refers to the planting of pines trees on the top of the rock and mentions that to do this a large amount of earth was dug and moved up the hill to plant the trees into. Maps also show how dynamic the heath is, with areas fluctuating between agriculture and heathland.

Penorchard Meadow

After its acquisition, we referred to each field by number, until a volunteer found a Victorian map of the site and we were able to start calling the fields by their true names such as Fox Field. One Victorian map clearly shows that one of the most botanically-rich fields is completely artificial – the result of a Victorian water pipeline. It also implies that the black poplar trees that sit on top of this were deliberately planted.



Map: Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

Continued from overleaf...

Case Study: Bishop's Field Research Project

Time and again the history helps to explain why things are as they are, gives us lessons and provides a fascinating background to interpret the sites for all who are interested whether public, visitors or volunteers.

To delve into all our sites is a massive undertaking so we dipped our toe into this minefield and many volunteers looked at one small nature reserve and were able to systematically sort out our archives and research the site.

The reserve we looked at was Bishop's Field. It was useful for me as I now understand why the higher ground is fenced off with iron railings; it was a Victorian playground, once covered in marsh orchids but is now a thicket of young alder trees.

The pools that are now insignificant were once used by villagers for boating. The channel where marsh marigold thrive is a former channel of Stour. The original name of the main marsh is Butcher's Field – animals were kept on here before slaughter and, yep, there was a butchers in the village. The rare greater tussock sedge thrives on the valley peat, first formed after the ice age. ... this is just a taster!



Bishop's Field, entrance © Andy Harris

What's next?

Are you interested in helping to research some of the hidden histories of our reserves?

How does it work?

To start with, some of our volunteer receptionists will sort through our office files to pick out significant historical facts relating to the period that we've owned a reserve. A team of volunteers will then take these files and create a timeline and any significant documents or articles will be saved for posterity.

Which reserves?

To begin with, we want to focus on: **The Devil's Spittleful and Chaddelsey Woods**

Other reserves will get done in time but, for now, we will concentrate efforts on just these sites.

Volunteer roles:

I will need one volunteer to lead other volunteers in compiling the information in a format that will suit us and we will need other volunteers to help that person. This format worked well when researching Bishop's Field.

We are working on pulling together a Volunteer Role Profile to give you more idea of what's involved but in the meantime, do get in touch if you might be interested in helping out.

Whilst absolutely fascinated by this I am unfortunately not able to devote time to researching the sites myself, so that's where you come in!

Andy Harris, Northern Reserves Officer

andyh@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org or 01905 754919



**Last minute gift ideas?
Need a few more cards?**

Why not visit our online shop for those last minute purchases?

Calendars, tea towels, seed balls, wildlife gift packs...

Order by **16th December** for guaranteed delivery before Christmas

Special event: 5th March 2020

"Britain's Wildlife: ups and downs, vanished species and new arrivals"

Malvern Local Groups's indoor meeting on 5th March will be a special fundraising event with two well-known speakers, Brett Westwood and Stephen Moss. They will be talking about recent changes in Britain's wildlife; some species are declining for whereas others are doing well.

The talk will take place at 7.30pm at the Eden Centre, Malvern (with a book-signing at 6.30pm)

TICKETS are on sale now for £15 plus booking fee (limited numbers available):

Simply visit: www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on

They will also be on sale at Malvern Local Group indoor meetings between now and then (£15 with no booking fee, cash or cheque only).



Thank you!

250+ swallows and house martins feeding at Hill Court Farm in September before migrating

110 bird species recorded at Lower Smite Farm

690 farmers advised on how to improve water quality by our Catchment Partnership Agriculture Advisors

530 children already inspired by our Lost Words assemblies

With your support:

Just a pick of the highlights that your hard work and support have helped us to achieve this year!

Thank you again for all your efforts, here's to another successful year in 2020!

Merry Christmas from all at

