

# Worcestershire **WILDLIFE**



**Worcestershire**  
Wildlife Trust



*Protecting wildlife where we live*



## We need your help to defend nature



Over the autumn we have been running an urgent campaign to urge MPs, councillors, Trust members and the public to do all they can to put a stop to the Government's proposed changes to planning and agriculture policies, which amount to an attack on nature.

In 2019 the Government was elected on a manifesto pledge to deliver the 'most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth.' The weakening of vital environmental protections is a 180-degree u-turn on that promise.

These changes relate to four key proposals:

- A delay and review to the England Land Management Scheme that provides funding to farmers and landowners, which could undermine policy and funding for environmental outcomes.
- The revocation of hundreds of laws, many of which provide vital environmental protections for our air, rivers and wildlife.
- The creation of Investment Zones where planning processes will be 'streamlined'.
- The lifting of the moratorium on fracking.

This campaign, for which all the major environmental charities have joined forces, has already been successful in garnering support from MPs at Westminster, leading to some partial reassurances from Government. At the time of writing, we still see these proposals as the biggest potential threat to wildlife for decades.

Deregulation is often characterised as 'cutting red tape' but it really means polluters can get away with poisoning our rivers and countryside; it means ripping up the rules that protect our most important wildlife sites from damage and removing funding that supports farmers to restore wildlife across our landscapes. For the good of future generations, we must retain existing laws and enhance nature protection instead.

Please visit our [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/defend-nature](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/defend-nature) to find out the latest.

Colin Raven, Director



Mark Hamblyn/2020VISION

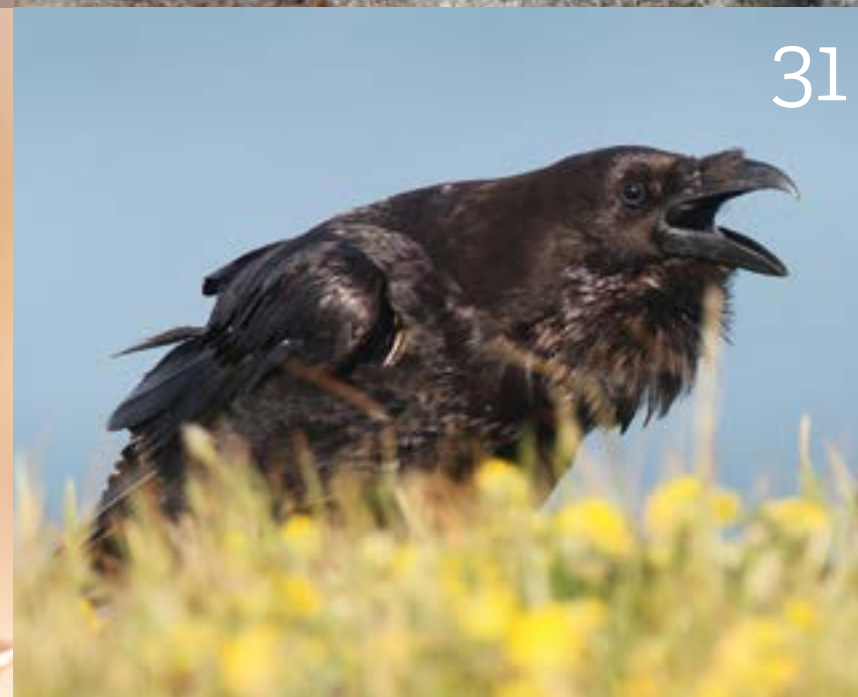


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James Hitchcock



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Andy Kaman

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**Our promise to you**  
 We aim to meet the highest standards in how we communicate with you. If you want to change the way you hear from us at any time, just get in touch.

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## Six ways to get involved with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

**Volunteer** Could you donate your skills and time to help wildlife? We have indoor and outdoor tasks that we need help with.  
[worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteer](http://worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteer)

**Donate** From purchasing land to protecting wildlife, exciting projects near you need your support.  
[worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/donate](http://worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/donate)

**Campaigning** You can play a vital role in raising awareness and helping to create a Wilder Future.  
[worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/take-action-wildlife](http://worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/take-action-wildlife)

**Local groups** Join one of our eight local groups to help make a difference and meet like-minded people.  
[worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/local-groups](http://worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/local-groups)

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# Our wild winter



Danny Green/2020VISION

**Imagine you're a small animal enjoying the season of mellow fruitfulness. The hedges in which you feed are laden with berries; food is abundant but there is a chill in the air and cold weather is on the way. Food will soon disappear, so how will you survive?**

If you are a small bird you might migrate to a warmer place or choose a different type of food. A small mammal might start collecting and storing fruits and seeds or building a

winter hibernation nest. Bats may fly long distances to join others in their annual hibernation roost. Cold-blooded snakes, slow-worms, frogs, toads and newts will search out a safe place below frost level to enter their winter torpor. Mated queen social bees and wasps, ladybirds, some shieldbugs and one of our commonest lacewings will find a hidden crevice to snuggle down to await spring. A few of our larger butterflies and moths will find a sheltered place to overwinter. Some birds will join tits to

form a feeding flock that provides extra safety in numbers and an increased chance of finding food. Corvids and starlings will roost overnight in large numbers so that the following morning the hungry birds might follow the ones who know where food is to be found.

Winter can be cold and inhospitable and each animal needs to be prepared if they are to survive. They may adopt one of several strategies such as migration, hibernation or adaptation.

Thanks  
to you

we're providing space for  
wildlife to survive winter  
across our nature  
reserves





Mark Hamblin/2020VISION, Swallow: Julie Hunt; Dormouse, Darryn Green

**Lifelong naturalists Rosemary Winnall and Harry Green explain more about the strategies our wildlife uses to survive winter.**



## Migration

Many birds migrate to escape the cold of winter and there are huge movements of birds across the world. Bird ringing has given us valuable information about the journeys of summer migrants to the UK such as reed warblers, swallows and swifts. Some species, including cuckoos, have been tagged with tracking devices that have revealed their winter homes in the sun. We also know in detail about the birds that arrive here in the UK, such as redwings, fieldfares,

knots and whooper swans, to escape the inclement winters further north. Our most familiar garden residents are joined by continental robins, blackbirds and starlings that fly here to spend the winter with us.

Climate change, though, is altering the habits of some birds. Chiffchaffs, for example, are shifting their departure and arrival times and some don't migrate at all. Another warbler in particular has benefitted from warmer winters and our fondness for feeding birds in our gardens.

Years ago, we knew that blackcaps were summer visitors that left in autumn to spend the winter in southern Europe or north Africa. Since the late 1960s, however, increasing numbers of blackcaps have changed their behaviour and are seen here during the winter. This is partly due to climate change and partly due to the food we provide at garden bird feeders; over 10,000 blackcaps are now estimated to overwinter here, taking advantage of this ready food source. Thanks to bird ringing

records, we know that our wintering blackcaps arrive from France, Germany and even Spain, flying northwest and north instead of heading south: some UK birds are thought to winter here too. This change in migratory behaviour allows some blackcaps to avoid arduous long-distance travel and arrive back at their breeding grounds earlier than the birds that winter further south. They can choose the best breeding sites and pass on their migratory genes to their offspring. As we fill our garden feeders, we are helping the blackcap to evolve a new migration strategy.

## Hibernation

To survive unfavourable conditions, some animals enter a state of torpor; body activity slows down to 30–40% of normal levels, temperature drops and heartbeat rate is greatly reduced. If this torpor becomes extended it is known as hibernation.



Justin Heath

Hazel dormice have a long hibernation, usually from October to the following May, enabling them to live in areas where food is abundant in summer and scarce in winter. In autumn they feed up on hazelnuts, and other available fruits, nuts and berries, and start to put on weight, gaining a fat energy store. A healthy summer dormouse weighs around 20g but this increases to 35–45g just before hibernation. It's not known what the trigger is for hibernation but it is likely to be a combination of lower temperatures, longer nights and body condition. Dormice, which live up in the trees during the summer months, hibernate on the ground, where the temperature is more stable; they build a small round nest about the size of a tennis ball that may be under moss, inside tree roots or under a hedge. As the weather gets colder they curl themselves into a tight ball, wrapping their tail around their face and body, and go into hibernation for up to eight months. If the weather warms up during that time and they wake, there is very little food

available for them and this can mean that they use up their extra storage of fat, perhaps not leaving enough to take them through the rest of the winter.

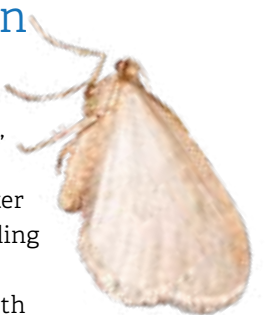
Hedgehogs eat worms, beetles and other invertebrates found on foraging hunts at night. In late autumn these prey items become increasingly scarce, so to survive the winter months a hedgehog must hibernate. In autumn they build up their fat reserves, each hedgehog needs to weigh around 500g to survive the winter; young from a second brood born in September often don't make that weight in time and may not survive until the following spring. Each hedgehog builds a hibernation nest of leaves and dried grass in dense vegetation or under piles of twigs. It then burrows into the heap, turning round and round to form an insulated cavity in which it hibernates, its body temperature falling from 25 °C to around 10 °C or less to match surrounding temperatures. Some of us are privileged to have hedgehogs visiting our gardens and even making nests in the shrubbery, under log

piles or in piles of leaves or compost. Sometimes they choose winter bonfire piles to hibernate and care should be taken to check these before lighting.

Our present warmer winters will undoubtedly affect hibernating animals, resulting in them waking up in mid-winter at a time when their usual food is not available.

## Adaptation

Many insects overwinter as eggs, larvae or pupae but, for some, winter is their main breeding time. How do they manage to cope with cold conditions? Winter moths, November moths, December moths, some gall wasps and winter gnats rely on endothermy, which enables the animal to produce heat internally through biochemical processes to remain active in cold conditions.



The winter moth *Operophtera*



Bas Yates



Did you know?

Early spring records indicate that heat-loving hummingbird hawk-moths are now able to survive our milder winters as hibernating adults. You can help us to understand more about this phenomenon by taking a photo or short video of these beautiful day-flying moths and uploading details to [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings)

*brumata* is one species that is able to cope with winter's freezing conditions. The females are flightless, having only tiny wing stubs, and they emerge from late autumn through to January from pupae in soil near the bases of trees, often oak. They crawl up the trunk where the flying males, which don't feed, find them by following their pheromone scent. After mating the females climb up into the canopy to lay their eggs, from which the small green caterpillars hatch in the spring to coincide with the opening of the tree leaf buds on which they feed.

Blue tits and great tits take advantage of this caterpillar food source to feed their nestlings and they time their breeding cycle to coincide with the moth's life cycle. Climate change is having an effect on this relationship and food chain.

It has been shown that, since 2000, the emergence of caterpillars of the winter moth has advanced faster than the emergence of oak leaf buds. This means that caterpillars that emerge

early often die from lack of food. In turn, blue tits and great tits cannot find enough food to feed their young and the numbers of eggs that they lay has reduced. As hatch timing of the caterpillars is genetically controlled, the moths are having to evolve to resynchronise with bud opening by delaying the response to the temperature trigger by five to 10 days.

Adapt to survive

The harsh months of winter prompt many changes in our native animals, whether it is a fox growing a thicker coat to stay warm, a mountain hare changing its coat to white to help camouflage it in snow, magpies and jays burying hazel nuts and acorns, wild honey bees storing honey, herald moths entering a cave or outbuilding to go into winter torpor, badgers taking in extra bedding or ourselves taking out our winter coats and boots in preparation for colder weather.

We now see animals in winter

that we never saw years ago such as harlequin ladybirds and little egrets. Along the south coast of England it is now possible to see swallows and sandwich terns in winter. Red admirals now stay and hibernate. We live in a changing world and animals, as well as ourselves, have to adapt to changing circumstances in order to survive.



**Harry Green.** WWT Trustee, is a life-long naturalist and ornithologist.



**Rosemary Winnall.** WWT member. Rosemary is interested in all aspects of wildlife, especially when linked to the Wyre Forest!



Help your local wildlife to survive winter:

- Feed the birds [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/feed-birds](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/feed-birds)
- Create space for wildlife [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-gardening](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-gardening)

Wendy Carter



Wildlife zero to hero



Left: Western conifer seed bug. Below: *Nigma walckenaeri* male and female



**When I moved to Worcestershire 11 years ago I was an 'armchair naturalist', watching TV documentaries and reading books about wildlife. After joining the Trust I started attending their wildlife discovery courses and going to talks and outings organised by their local groups. It was on one of these visits that I first met Harry Green, to whom I will be forever grateful for introducing me to the weird and wonderful world of invertebrates.**

My passion for creatures with six (and more) legs began when I found a most impressive bug malingering in my curtains. I knew nothing about insects but was curious to know what it was so I contacted Harry. He identified it as a western conifer seed bug, a species that was just starting to be seen locally. Harry explained the value of recording such sightings – documenting what we've got, where it is and observations of behaviour can tell us a lot about the spread or decline of a species and how we can help it. He also encouraged me

to join the Worcestershire Recorders, a society for people interested in observing, recording and studying natural history.

I am now so fascinated by all these little creatures that are vital to our ecosystems that it's hard to believe it was only seven years ago when, with some trepidation, I joined the Worcestershire Recorders and started my wildlife education! I remember at my first field meeting thinking 'What on earth am I doing here amongst these experts?' I needn't have worried as everyone was so friendly and happy to share their finds and knowledge (and it turned out that I was quite good at spotting things of interest).

As a late starter with a lot to learn, it would be sensible to specialise and focus my efforts on one group but the trouble is that I'm fascinated by everything. I have, however, acquired some mini obsessions. To my neighbours' amusement, for example, I spend many happy hours peering at an ivy-covered wall, observing and

recording the goings on in the life of the green mesh spider *Nigma walckenaeri*. I also stare at tree trunks, watching the interactions between jet black ants *Lasius fuliginosus* and giant maple aphids *Stomaphis graffii*.

Hopefully my experiences show that it's never too late to start developing your wildlife interests and any records you are able to contribute will make a difference to our knowledge of local wildlife. A nice easy way to get started is by using the Wildlife Sightings form. Happy hunting!



Let us know what you see. Take a picture and upload details via [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings)



**Jean Young,** WWT member. Keen on all things small, Jean has become one of the county's most prolific naturalists.



# Local news



## Dormouse discovery

Footprints of elusive dormice have been found at our Hollybed Farm Meadows nature reserve.

Our team knew that dormice were in the area but previous surveys had failed to confirm their presence. Earlier this year, however, Dave Smith was rewarded with a series of distinctive footprints in traps that he'd placed in hedgerows around the site as part of his MSc project.

Tomos Holloway, our officer responsible for the reserve, was delighted 'Our sensitive management of the hedgerows has been rewarded! We're restoring the meadows but it isn't just about the wildflowers in the fields; the whole nature reserve and the wider area need to work together as one large unit in order to maximise the benefit of this special place for wildlife.'

Well managed hedgerows offer nuts, berries, insects and flowers as well as acting as natural superhighways that allow the largely nocturnal dormice to move through the countryside.

Survey work will continue and Tomos hopes that dormouse signs will be found in more hedgerows.

Ian Pratt

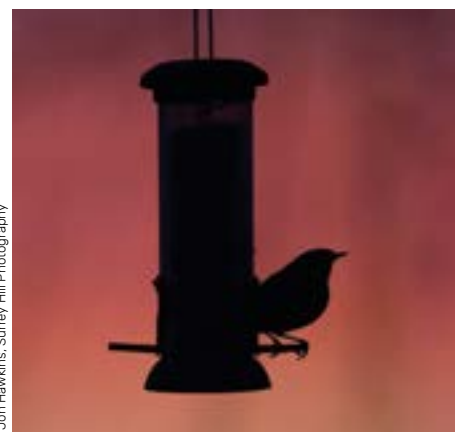
## Nextdoor Nature

Our Queen's Jubilee-funded project Nextdoor Nature is well underway in Bromsgrove and Redditch where we hope to support local communities connect with the nature that's on their doorstep. We'll be encouraging more people to help wildlife to flourish whilst they benefit from being in the great outdoors, building stronger community relationships.

We have identified key open spaces and started conversations with local hubs such as churches, libraries and community centres. If you're a local resident or part of a community group or organisation and would like to find out more, please get in contact with [yasmina@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org](mailto:yasmina@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org)

## A scoop full

To cut down on plastic waste, we're offering bird food by the scoop from Lower Smitte Farm. You can buy in bulk from us or from Vine House Farm (who'll deliver to your door) but if you'd prefer to buy in smaller quantities, bring your own container/s and we can fill them for you. Visit [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/feed-birds](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/feed-birds) for information about prices and what we stock.



Jon Hawkins, Surrey Hill Photography



Alexander Mustard/2020VISION

## We bet you didn't know

Female crayfish (above) lay up to 200 eggs, which are carried under her abdomen through winter. When hatched, the larval crayfish remain on mum until they become independent in late spring. See page 27 for more.



## Christmas is coming

Don't forget to order cards, calendars and gifts from our website [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/shop](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/shop) or in person from Lower Smitte Farm. Last posting date for orders is Wednesday 14th December.

Thank you to the following retailers for selling our cards: Alfrick Community Shop, Clive's Fruit Farm, Droitwich Heritage Centre, Forge Mill shops, Gwilliams Farm Shop, the Hop Pocket, the Pump House Environment Centre, Revill's Farm Shop and Upton Snodsbury Village Store.



Phil Ruler

## Spotting sparrows

Our Wildlife Sightings scheme is putting Worcestershire's house sparrows on the map.

County bird recorder, Craig Reed, has crunched last year's data and was

thrilled with the information 'People who submitted house sparrow records via the scheme in 2021 reported more breeding evidence than was received in total for the 2020 annual bird report.'

'One of the questions that we hope to answer is whether gaps on the map illustrate a genuine absence of birds or whether they represent a lack of people submitting records. As more sightings are submitted, we can review modern records against historic ones to help assess the status of sparrows in Worcestershire.'

'Sixty-three per cent of house sparrow records submitted via Wildlife Sightings were from new locations.'

Take a picture and submit your wildlife sightings [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings)

## 2022 raffle

Thank you to everyone who bought a ticket, helping us to raise £6,624.44 to help wildlife in Worcestershire. The winners are:

Mr Drage, Dr J. Hubbard, Mr Morley, Mr & Mrs Saunders, Ms Woodward.

## Digital magazine

If you'd like to try our magazine in a digital format, you can download a pdf from our website [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/magazineNov22](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/magazineNov22). If you'd prefer to receive it like this in future, you can let us know using the form on the page.



## Corporate membership

Thank you to our corporate members who have either joined or renewed their membership this year:

- ADS Procurement
- Bespoke Advice Limited
- Clent Hills Vets
- Holidaycottages.co.uk
- OCM Business Systems Ltd
- SPAL Automotive UK
- Wienerberger UK

Corporate membership is a great way for businesses to show their commitment to Worcestershire's wildlife and we aim to develop lasting relationships with companies and teams who share our vision and support our conservation aims.

If your business is interested in supporting our work, visit [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/corporate-membership](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/corporate-membership) for more information.



## The end of log sales

Log sales at Tiddesley Wood were set up in 1990 to support our conservation forestry work. Recently we have had to consider their viability with reducing volumes of timber available from our operations, rising costs and the need to replace our storage facilities.

We have taken the difficult decision to close our log sales at the end of this sales season in February 2023 or until our current stocks are sold out.

We want to thank our loyal and regular customers for your support over the years. We would also like to say a huge thank you to all the hard-working volunteers who have run the sales for over 30 years. Thank you all!

## Membership rates

We aim to change minimum membership subscription rates in line with inflation every three years. Whilst the forthcoming change is below the inflation rate during the period since the previous increase, the new rate will help us to manage higher costs that we are incurring at this time.

### From 1st January 2023:

- Household memberships will increase by 50p per month: £3pm/36pa to £3.50pm/£42pa.
- Family memberships will increase by 50p per month: £4.25pm/£51pa to £4.75pm/£57pa.
- Wildlife Watch memberships for young people remains at £15 per year.



## Severn Treescapes

Work continues on our ambitious Severn Treescapes partnership with colleagues in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire Wildlife Trusts. Launch events took place in October and our officers are now working with landowners across a 60mile corridor, stretching from the Wye Valley in the south to the Wyre Forest in the north.

We are helping to deliver new woodlands, orchards and hedgerow improvements to buffer and better link existing woodlands. Tree planting, in the right place using the right species, at a landscape scale is vital for wildlife and to help combat the effects of climate change. It will also help in our aim to have 30% of land managed for nature by 2030.

This is the start of a really exciting programme and if you're a landowner in the west of the county who is interested in getting involved, please get in touch [enquiries@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org](mailto:enquiries@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org) / 01905 754919.

[www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/severn-treescapes](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/severn-treescapes)

## Events

From guided walks to indoor and online talks, take a look at the What's On pages of our website to discover how to get more involved and discover more about wildlife. [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on)

# UK news

## You made the government give a dam! Crisis calculations

England has taken a few tentative steps towards seeing a return of beavers to the wild, following new legislation announced by Defra. The legislation will provide legal protections for beavers in England, making it an offence to deliberately capture, kill, disturb, or injure beavers, or damage their breeding sites or resting places, without holding the appropriate license. The legislation is scheduled to come into force in the autumn.

These new protections could pave the way for beavers to be released into the wild in England under license, finally making a widespread comeback after being hunted to extinction in the sixteenth century. This decision echoes the path taken in Scotland, where beavers were declared a European Protected Species in 2019, affording them similar protections to those proposed in England.

The legislation was initially due to be laid in parliament on the 19th of July but the UK Government held it up at the last minute. Following outrage from nature charities and the wider public, including lots of Wildlife Trust supporters, the decision was reconsidered and the announcement made just a few days later.

Beavers are ecosystem engineers. Their actions create thriving and dynamic wetlands that bring a wealth of benefits to both nature and people, including playing a critical role in adapting to a changing climate. Long-term studies of beavers from the Scottish Beaver Trial and in enclosures in England have demonstrated the improvements they can bring to our rivers and wetlands, making it clear that beavers belong in our landscape.

Commenting on the UK Government's decision, The Wildlife Trusts' chief executive Craig Bennett says: 'The widespread return of wild

beavers can be a game changer for restoring lost wetlands, benefitting all kinds of wildlife, and helping people by holding water back in the landscape, reducing the risk of wildfires and reducing the risk of flooding downstream. Bringing back wild beavers isn't just a dream, it is a critical part of addressing the climate and nature crises.'

Whilst The Wildlife Trusts believe bringing back beavers is essential, reintroducing any ecosystem engineer is a delicate operation. Natural England is developing guidance on the management of beavers, setting out the actions that will or will not require a license. We are urging the UK Government to support ambitious and carefully targeted reintroduction projects, reward landowners who make space for wetlands created by beavers, develop management systems that protect beavers and resolve issues effectively, and support local beaver management groups to deliver advice and assistance.

The news of this legislation came as Wildlife Trusts around England celebrated the birth of beaver kits at enclosed projects on nature reserves. The Welsh Beaver Project, led by Wildlife Trusts Wales, also saw its first kit born at an enclosure at Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust's Cors Dyfi nature reserve.

Get the latest on our journey to bring beavers back to Britain at [wildlifetrusts.org/saving-species/beavers](http://wildlifetrusts.org/saving-species/beavers)



Russell Savory

Beavers are making a comeback across the UK

**Thank you!** We couldn't help wildlife without you!

**274** species of insects recorded at Dropping Well Farm.

**13** little egrets feeding at Upton Warren in August.

**250+** green-winged orchids in seven fields at Hollybed Meadows (up from one in one field in 2016).

**2,139** schoolchildren inspired about wildlife January-July 2022.

**1** new record for Worcestershire – the paper wasp *Polistes dominula* spotted at Wilden Marsh nature reserve.

The Wildlife Trusts have published a groundbreaking report examining the projected impacts of climate change on our nature reserves. It assesses the risks of a changing climate and what we need to do to help nature adapt. The report shows that extreme weather is already affecting many nature reserves through wildfires, flooding and drought. The report also shares innovative Wildlife Trust projects that aim to reduce the impacts on wildlife.

Read the report at [wtru.st/changing-nature](http://wtru.st/changing-nature)



Wildfires are becoming more common due to climate change

Adam Boulton, Surrey Wildlife Trust

## Remembering Her Majesty the Queen

Queen Elizabeth II was celebrated for her passion for the outdoors, the countryside and rural life, lending her support to the work of The Wildlife Trusts and many environmental charities over the years. The Wildlife Trusts are proud to have been a part of Coronation Meadows – an inspirational idea to mark the 60th anniversary of the Queen's Coronation in 2013. These meadows will stand as a lasting natural legacy – 90 have so far been created.



# Worcestershire's nature reserves

**We usually think of our nature reserves in broad terms such as woodlands, grasslands, heathlands or wetlands. The reality on virtually every site, however, is a much more complex mix of habitats. I don't think I've ever encountered a 'hedge' reserve, perhaps because they form the boundary rather than the obvious feature, but this undervalues the importance of these amazing features as wildlife homes, feeding stations and transport links through the landscape. A very quick look at our largest reserve, Hill Court**

**Farm, suggests around 12,000 metres of hedges (about 7.5 miles), which adds up to a lot of berries, nuts, nectar and breeding pairs of farmland birds such as yellowhammers and whitethroats to name a few.**

Good management of hedges is important, especially when we look at how we cut them. Cutting no more than a third in each year is a good way to leave plenty of food but some species prefer a denser, trimmed hedge so it is important not to leave it all uncut. Diversity of species requires

some diversity of structure and it isn't feasible to manage all our hedges by cutting and laying – the traditional people-powered version of hedge management. Of course, our staff and volunteers do undertake some hedge-laying and if you'd like to see our volunteers demonstrating this historic art, you can watch us hard at work [www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-ICLhHzWLo&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-ICLhHzWLo&t=1s)

Whilst we celebrate the value of our hedges, we should remember that we have lost so many since

the second world war when fields were expanded to intensify food production and accommodate bigger machinery. It is, therefore, important to plant new hedges wherever we can, especially where we can join up existing stretches and recreate the wildlife corridors in our landscapes. We are very pleased to be replacing some 'ghost hedges' at our Naunton Court Fields, replanting stretches that were removed many decades ago, bringing a little bit of history back to life. We will also be planting another

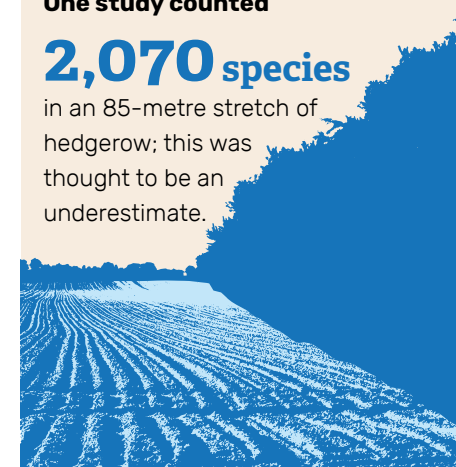
570m at Dropping Well Farm, with six trees planted for every metre to create a dense, rich mix of species – that's an impressive 3,420 trees.

We are also making plans to better connect our hedges at Green Farm as part of our woodland planting scheme, hopefully allowing the dormice of neighbouring Monkwood to spread out into nearby woodlands and offering the added benefit of sheltered feeding corridors for bats to venture further out into the surrounding countryside. Let's hear it for hedges!

**One study counted**

**2,070 species**

in an 85-metre stretch of hedgerow; this was thought to be an underestimate.





## Knowing what's where

As part of our ongoing restoration at Dropping Well Farm, we've had a summer of survey work to understand what's there now so that we can measure the success of heathland restoration. Our invertebrate survey recorded nearly 250 insect species, including some that are genuinely rare, such as *Andrena nigrospina*, the scarce black mining bee. We've also seen interesting results from our botany and bird surveys with a confirmation of breeding stonechats on the neighbouring Devil's Spittleful.

Survey work across all of our reserves is essential to keeping our finger on the pulse of the wildlife of the land that we manage. The majority is undertaken by skilled and dedicated volunteers and the information they provide is very gratefully received and used by our reserves team to decide future plans for our sites. We always need more ecological data so if you have survey skills you'd like to use on our reserves please get in touch and we'll see if we have a suitable site near you.

You don't need to be a skilled ecologist to get involved either; we always need enthusiastic people to help us with managing our sites, with involvement ranging from occasionally joining a work party through to volunteer reserve managers who work closely with our

staff to shape the course of their 'patch' and running the practical work on their chosen site. It can be a very rewarding role and we offer additional training and support to get people up to speed. Check our website or chat to us about joining our team.

## Getting a grounding

On the subject of joining the team, we welcomed Andy Bucklitch in September as our new Practical Land Management Officer, running our trainee team to do the small, tricky jobs on our reserves while giving them the training to go on to jobs in the conservation world. We've had great success with our previous trainees going on to work with us or other conservation organisations and we're looking forward to watching Andy bring on our newest group of four. If you'd like to know a bit more about our trainees and their journey with us, there are blogs on our website from current and past trainees.

One thing they will get involved with is a great partnership with the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, who have bought a seed harvester to collect wildflower seeds from ecologically rich meadows to use to create and improve new meadows. This year is the first year of the partnership and we have collected seed from our Knapp and Papermill and Hollybed Farm Meadows nature reserves. Some of the seed will be used

to create new meadows near these reserves, while some will be used to restore poorer parts of the sites it was collected from. Trainees and volunteers have been involved in preparing the ground and sowing the seed in autumn for, hopefully, great results the following spring.

## Romsley's marvellous meadows

On a final note, we are working hard on plans to restore Romsley Manor Farm Meadows in the north Worcestershire village of Romsley. The first phase is to replace the fencing to allow grazing and restore the exciting acidic grassland of this mix of dry and damp fields (and wonderful mature hedges of course).

Thanks to everyone who has so far supported the Trust's efforts to purchase these meadows. At the time of going to press, our fundraising work was ongoing so please look out for the latest information on [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/appeals/romsley-meadows](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/appeals/romsley-meadows) and through our e-newsletter and social media accounts.



**Rob Allen**, WWT Reserves Team Leader. Rob cares passionately for wildlife and has spent his career trying to reverse ecological decline.



Seed harvesting at The Knapp

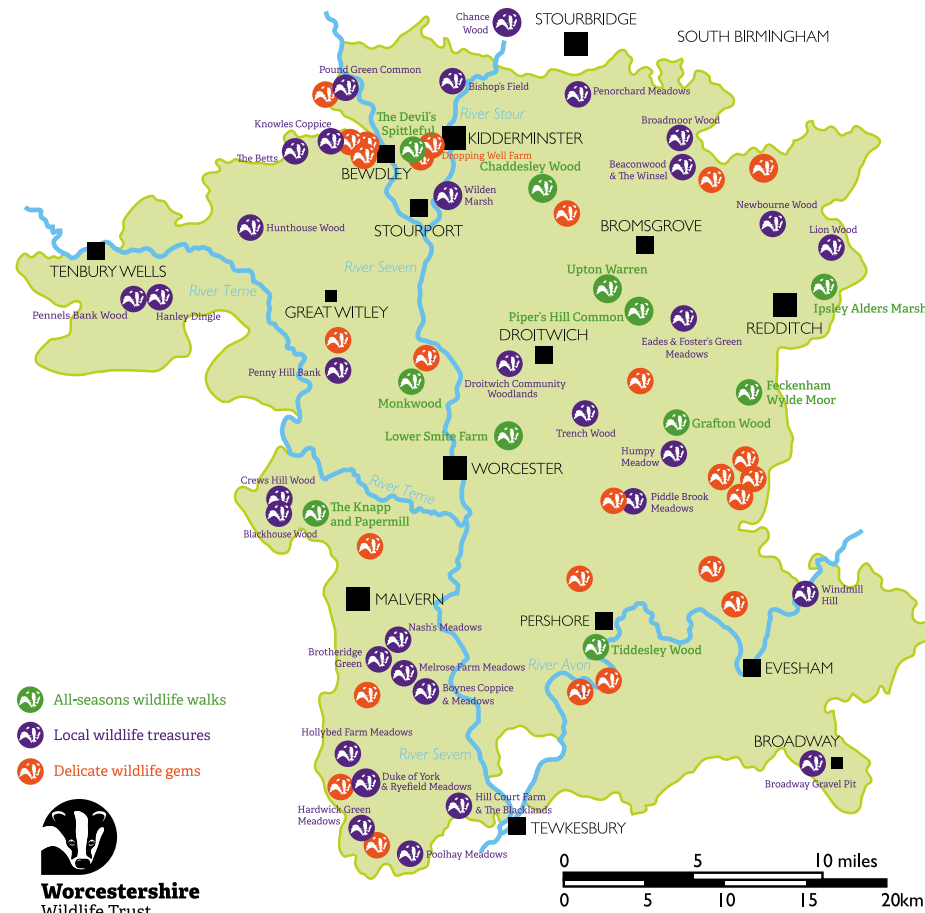
Dominique Cragg



### Did you know?

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust have satellite tagged five curlews as part of monitoring the population and range of this threatened species. One of their birds, Tim (AT), is a regular visitor at our Upton Warren wetland reserve. Discover more [www.wwt.org.uk/our-work/projects/eurasian-curlew-recovery/curlew-tracking](http://www.wwt.org.uk/our-work/projects/eurasian-curlew-recovery/curlew-tracking) and report colour tagged curlew to [curlew@wwt.org.uk](mailto:curlew@wwt.org.uk)

Dan Cornall



Interested in volunteering? Visit [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteer](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteer) for more information and details on how to get in touch with us.

Follow our trainees [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/blog/conservation-trainees](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/blog/conservation-trainees)

## HIGH FIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Photos by: Harry Green, Roger Plant, Rosemary Winnall, Barry Green.



1. Ivy berries, feeding birds near you.
2. Brambling, in your garden if you're very lucky.
3. Winter moth, on tree trunks.
4. Snow flea, hunting on moss in the Wyre Forest.
5. Porcelain fungus, on dead beech trees.



Scarce black mining bee *Andrena nigrospina*

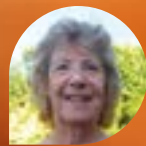
Rosemary Winnall



# Worcestershire's brilliant bryophytes

Although small and easily overlooked there are over 350 mosses and 95 liverworts, collectively known as bryophytes, recorded in Worcestershire. Mosses are flowerless plants with leaves that are spirally arranged around a stem. They have two basic growth habits: upright tufts or cushions (acrocarpous) and sprawling (pleurocarpous). Liverworts come in two forms: leafy liverworts with a stem and distinct leaves and thallose liverworts that usually consist of flat,

elongated plates of tissue growing close to the substrate. Mosses and liverworts grow in a wide variety of habitats and on many substrates. They can be studied year round but are at their best in winter when other plants have died down.



Ann Hill is an ecologist and the appointed bryophyte recorder for Worcestershire.



**Lesser featherwort *Plagiochila porelloides*** is a green to dark-green leafy liverwort that colonises a wide range of moist, sheltered habitats from woodland banks to stream-sides. The large leaves overlap and there are small marginal teeth (use a hand lens) on the unlobed, broadly rounded-ovate leaves. This species and *Plagiochila asplenioides* are sometimes extremely similar in appearance but the latter is usually much larger.



**Cypress-leaved plait-moss *Hypnum cupressiforme*** is one of Worcestershire's most abundant and most variable moss with many varieties and similar species. It has a moderately robust habit, forming prostrate mats on trees, both in woods and in the open, and on logs, walls, rocks, roofs and occasionally on the ground. The leaves are strongly curved and finely pointed and often overlap in a symmetrical way as on a cypress branchlet.



**Common liverwort *Marchantia polymorpha subsp. ruderalis*** is a thallose liverwort almost always found in man-made and disturbed habitats. The plant is thick and leathery with an irregular black midrib. The photo shows the liverwort in the fertile state with 'umbrella-like' male and female receptacles, which are disc-shaped in the male and nine-rayed in the female, and raised symmetrical gemma cups, which become new liverworts.



**Lateral cryphaea *Cryphaea heteromalla*** grows in dull or dark green patches on bare bark or through a thin layer of other bryophytes, in particular on elder, ash and willow in sheltered humid conditions. The main stems creep along the bark whereas the erect branches project stiffly away. The projecting stems are best spotted by looking at the mossy trunks of trees and shrubs in profile.



**Wood bristle-moss *Orthotrichum affine*** is a common epiphyte on the exposed trunks and branches of trees and shrubs in open woodland, towns, roadsides and along watercourses. It is occasionally found on walls. The moss forms small, loose tufts of a dull, dark-green colour. Its abundant capsules (held on short stalks), only just visible projecting from amongst the upper leaves, can be found all year round.



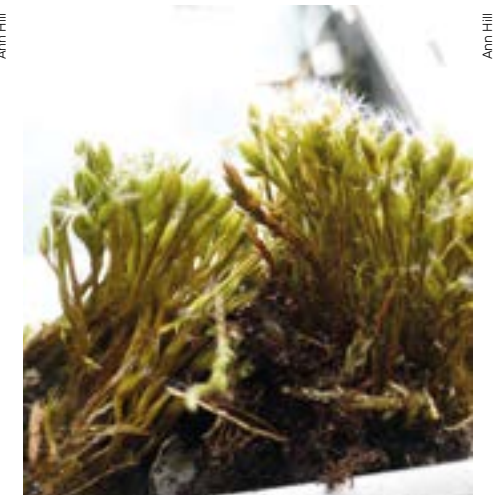
**Grey-cushioned grimmia *Grimmia pulvinata*** is one of the most distinctive cushion mosses of tomb stones, wall tops and concrete. The leaves have a long silvery hair tips that give the cushions a hoary, greyish appearance. Fruit capsules are common and are held on a long curved seta (short stalk) partially buried amongst the leaves; the seta straightens as the plant ages.



**Forked veilwort *Metzgeria furcata*** grows as a flattened thin coating on the trunks and branches of a wide range of deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs (but rarely on conifers). It is also found on dead wood and rock surfaces. The liverwort is ubiquitous throughout Worcestershire. It has a clearly defined narrow midrib with narrow (1-1.5mm wide), irregularly forked, strap-shaped branches that adhere closely to the substrate.



**Springy turf-moss *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*** is often the bane of a keen gardener's life! It is a common sprawling moss that grows in coarse tufts or wefts, sometimes extensive, in a wide variety of grassy habitats and is especially common in lawns. The leaves are triangular with long tapered points that curve back sharply on themselves (squamose) giving the plant a rather spikey appearance.



**Heath star moss *Campylopus introflexus*** is a common weed species first recorded in the UK in 1941. It forms 1-4cm tall tufts or patches (sometimes extensive) and is conspicuous when dry by the star-like hairpoints of the upper leaves. The moss is a pioneer of bare acid soil, thin sandy soil at the edge of tracks, on old logs and walls: this photo was taken on my greenhouse glass.

Discover more: [www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer)





Jane Burton, naturepl.com

Stag beetle larvae



Neil Aldridge

Nuthatch



Mark Hamblin/2020VISION

**Decaying trunks, rotting stumps and fallen trees are all in hot demand. This prime real estate is home to a huge variety of wildlife. There's a fantastic range of properties in our deadwood portfolio, from the high-rise to the sprawling single-storey. These habitats all play an important role in the nutrient cycle, help to lock up carbon and even improve the stability of our soils. Interested in seeing the particulars? Then let's go on a viewing and get to know the neighbourhood!**

### Family-friendly environment

Neighbourhoods rich in dead and decaying wood are home to incredibly diverse communities. Many of the residents are invertebrates and fungi that play an important role in breaking down wood. A lot of them are entirely dependent on dead or decaying wood for at least part of their life cycle – we call this saproxylic. Some of our most recognisable insects are saproxylic.

The larvae of the majestic stag beetle favour basement locations in underground deadwood, whilst black and yellow longhorn beetle larvae are long-term tenants of fallen branches, taking up to three years to leave their home as adults. Finding the ideal location for a young family is also high on the house-hunting agenda for the batman hoverfly. It seeks out rot holes in trees where wet, decaying wood

makes an ideal nursery. Fungi that thrive in these locations range from the delicate stalks of candlesnuff fungus to the chunky chicken of the woods.

### Location, location, location

A third of all woodland birds nest in the hollows or cavities of dead trees. Great spotted woodpeckers drill their own holes, whilst nuthatches and tawny owls seek out existing gaps. Other birds of prey will use standing dead trees as a lookout post or for somewhere to devour their prey.

Many of our bat species search for trees with lots of character (cavities, rot holes, fissures and splits) in which to roost. Our biggest bat, the noctule, isn't put off by a pre-loved home. They often favour old woodpecker holes. The rare and elusive barbastelle bat, found only in woods with plenty of standing deadwood, often takes advantage of spaces behind lifted, flaky bark plates.

They are not alone in the vertebrate community in finding deadwood attractive. Through the seasons, many amphibians and reptiles will be taken with the charm of a log pile. Its amenities include shelter, a lookout point, somewhere to bed down, a sun lounger and so many opportunities for eating out right on the doorstep – deadwood has it all!

### On the water

It's not just land-lovers who appreciate deadwood. Fallen logs in rivers can provide the perfect refuge for fish and a whole host of aquatic invertebrates. They can also be a spraint spot for an otter or a perch for a kingfisher. They even act as natural dams and can slow the flow of a river or stream, reducing erosion and holding water back in times of heavy rain, helping to make the landscape more resilient.

### Your next move

With 13% of all plants and animals known in the UK directly dependent on deadwood habitats, it's a vital component of our landscapes. We must respect it, protect it and seek to create more of it! Make a garden more appealing by creating a log pile. If you have a tree stump in the garden, leave it for your new wild neighbours to move into. Pop out the welcome mat and wait to see who turns up to the housewarming!



**Chloë Edwards** is director of nature recovery at Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Chloë is a deadwood enthusiast and loves marvelling at the life in the deadwood features in her garden.

For tips on making a deadwood dwelling

visit [wildlifetrusts.org/log-shelter](http://wildlifetrusts.org/log-shelter)



# Worcestershire's deadwood



Eleanor Reast

**More than 2,000 of our native invertebrates depend on decaying or deadwood for their survival. Deadwood is also a fantastic resource that can be home to bat roosts, provide a safe corridor for small mammals and be just the right softness for a woodpecker to drill through for food.**

Across our nature reserves, there are many ways that we encourage deadwood. You might see piles of brash (small tree branches left over from coppicing or forestry work) and logs of all sizes that are stacked under trees or formed into lines (known as windrows).

In some places, like in the orchard at The Knapp and Papermill, we've turned dead logs into pyramids that imitate standing dead trees. We hope these may entice noble chafer beetles to lay eggs underneath the bark of the dead trunks, as they would do on a living tree. When the larvae hatch they feed on decaying wood for two to three years until they're ready to pupate to adulthood.

You may also see entire trees that have been left to decay where they've fallen, mimicking natural processes like storm events. A lot of the trunk will be in contact with the ground and all the wonderful things that are in the soil – fungi, deadwood specialists and millions of micro-organisms. These help to break down the tree whilst providing a different kind of deadwood home for ground beetles and erupting fungal bodies like blushing bracket.

As ash dieback disease sweeps across Worcestershire, we're trying to retain as much ash as possible in the hope that some trees may be resistant to the disease. Inevitably, some tree work has to take place for safety reasons and, where possible, we try to reduce the tree by taking off the canopy but leaving the main trunk, rather than felling the entire tree at the base. We've taken this one step further on some reserves and have cut spiky tops into the trunk after removing the canopy. This encourages

rain to get into the heart of the trunk, giving a boost to the rotting process to create soft wood for hammering woodpeckers and hole-nesters like blue tits. We've also been creative with chainsaws and cut into the trunk to form a natural bird box within the stem itself. Speeding up the creation of naturally-forming features like rot holes and decaying wood is called 'veteranising' as these would usually develop when a tree is getting towards old age.

Keep a look out for deadwood habitats when out and about but please leave them be – they don't appreciate being disturbed, rolled over or prodded!



**Dominique Cragg**, WWT Western Reserves Officer. Dom is on a lifelong journey to explore, discover and protect our natural world.

## Drum roll, please . . .

**A woodland bird and deadwood specialist, the great spotted woodpecker is more often heard than seen despite its striking plumage. Fortunately for us it enjoys visiting our gardens to take advantage of the peanuts and suet feasts we provide and it's always an occasion when this flamboyant guest makes an appearance.**

Both males and females sport a vivid red splash under the tail but only the male has a red nape patch. Juveniles have a red crown and are paler red under the tail.

They are uniquely adapted to exploit deadwood for excavating their nests, probing for insect prey and territorial drumming displays in early spring where resonance is key in allowing the sound to travel further.

They can drum at up to an astonishing 40 beats per second – a spongy mass of tissue cushions the base of the skull, allowing them to headbang without getting a headache!

They are considered a keystone species as they play a crucial role in creating suitable deadwood habitat for other cavity-nesting birds, bats and invertebrates.

They possess such a long sticky tongue that it has to be stored over the back of the skull.

Zygodactyl feet, with two toes pointing forwards and two pointing back, allow them to scamper up trunks and along branches, with a short, stiffened tail for support.

Woodpecker lore links them both with water and the divination of rain. Perhaps the thundery sound of drumming from an oak, the sacred 'thunder tree' of Zeus, helped inspire this particular legend.

Other tales link them with disobedience to a god's commands, so in retribution they are condemned to forever peck wood and cry for rain. 'Great spot' populations are doing well and they have recently become established as a breeding bird in Ireland.

Words: **Sandra Young**

Photo: **Mark Hamblin/2020VISION**





# Green light for Green Farm!

**We are delighted to have been successful in raising over £580,000 to purchase and restore 59 acres of land at Green Farm adjacent to our Monkwood nature reserve. Thank you to everyone who has donated to make this possible and for the many messages of support we have received from our members and supporters. We could not have done this without you.**

Alongside our fundraising efforts we are indebted to the input from volunteers. This includes our Monkwood management committee that involves Butterfly Conservation with whom we co-manage Monkwood. Paul Lane's brilliant photographs have showcased this beautiful place, Monkwood work party volunteers work tirelessly to manage the site and, of course, our dedicated biological recorders who help us to know what's there. Thanks also to various local people and organisations who have shared their thoughts and ideas for the site.

## The work begins

The project itself will get underway in early 2023. As mentioned in your spring 2022 magazine, we aim to restore some areas to woodland through a combination of natural regeneration and tree planting. Butterflies and other insects will appreciate the improvements we'll make to the meadows along the woodland edge of Monkwood, whilst people will benefit from improvements to the Monkwood car park and bridleway to make surfaces better for wheelchairs and buggies. Signage will be replaced throughout the site, helping visitors to understand more about this important place. We'll also work with several local organisations including Wild Goose Rural Training CIC and nearby schools.

As part of the project, we now have insights into the ecology, history and archaeology of the land at Green Farm. Surveys not only indicated which species use the site but also highlighted historic features that we plan to retain and protect.

## A glimpse into the past

Historically, the area was more wooded with cultivated areas and woodland clearings used largely for livestock. We have identified areas of medieval and post-medieval ridge and furrow in areas that will be maintained as meadows. The report identified very old hedgerows, one of which we believe to be over 1,000 years old, and former hedge lines that we plan to restore. The research identified an area that had been an orchard until around 1940 so our plans include replanting this with local heritage fruit trees.

Investigations have also highlighted the existence for centuries of wood pasture around Monkwood. We intend to reintroduce this, providing widely spaced trees with grazing animals to manage the pasture beneath. There are areas where archaeological remains are potentially buried and we will avoid planting trees here to ensure they are protected.

## Wildlife of the future

The ecological surveys identified the huge potential to do more for wildlife across Green Farm and we've built these findings into our plans. Ecological surveys, for example, found great crested newts, a European protected species, in both ponds on Green Farm. In time we expect to not only restore former ponds but also introduce more wet areas across the land.

Volunteers have begun a new butterfly transect, identifying over 20 species, including the rare wood white that Monkwood is now a stronghold for. The meadows will increasingly be important for butterflies and other invertebrates.

Monkwood is a regionally important site for dormice and we hope that, thanks to monitoring tubes that have been placed around Green Farm, it won't be long before we find our first dormice on the new nature reserve. We're in the process of identifying areas where habitats and connecting corridors are disconnected, such as gaps in hedgerows. This connectivity is important for all wildlife, not least of which are the bats that make their home here. Six species, including soprano pipistrelle, noctule and lesser horseshoe bats, have so far been recorded, particularly along the woodland edge with Monkwood.

Surveys of resident and migratory birds have identified nine amber

or red list bird species using Green Farm, including bullfinch and willow warbler. These are species where there is moderate or high concern about their numbers and distribution.

Where wildflowers are concerned, there is a mixed picture across the site, with some areas of species-rich grassland and others with little species diversity where there is good potential for woodland creation and regeneration. We've been delighted to see green-winged orchids and adder's-tongue fern in places and look forward to seeing what else emerges in the future.

These surveys have provided vital evidence of wildlife already there and are an important baseline from which we can assess what we hope will be significant improvements for wildlife across the site. We can't wait to get started.



**Mike Perry**, WWT Head of Resources. Mike enjoys exploring wildlife with his wife and two young sons.

Find out more and keep up to date with the project at:

- [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/green-farm](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/green-farm)
- [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/e-newsletter](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/e-newsletter)
- [www.facebook.com/worcestershirewildlifetrust](http://www.facebook.com/worcestershirewildlifetrust)
- [www.twitter.com/WorcsWT](http://www.twitter.com/WorcsWT)

## Thanks to you

**As well as support from our members, we would like to thank:**

- The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation that purchased the site to give us time to raise funds to buy the land from them.
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund, a significant funder of our work, for their grant of £240,000 towards the total project costs.
- Severn Waste Services, brilliant supporters of the Trust, who have donated £100,000.
- The Banister Charitable Trust, a major supporter of Trust land purchases, who have made a significant donation.
- A private donation from a couple for an amazing £100,000.
- Private individuals for various donations of up to £10,000.
- The Andrew Harris Charitable Trust and 3dtotal.com Ltd for their generous donations.



Paul Lane



Terry Whitaker 2020/VISION



Tom Marshall



# Silent Earth:

## Averting the insect apocalypse

**Dave Goulson**



Since I was a child I have been obsessed with insects; they are amazing, often beautiful and with fascinating, peculiar lives. I grew up in the countryside, and spent my childhood roaming the lanes and meadows in search of caterpillars, butterflies, grasshoppers and beetles. My bedroom filled with jam jars, cages and tanks housing all manner of small beasts. I eventually came to learn that the world would not function without these tiny creatures. They pollinate; control pests; recycle all sorts of organic material from dung to corpses, tree trunks and leaves; they keep the soil healthy; disperse seeds; and provide food for many larger creatures such as birds, bats, lizards, amphibians and fish.

It should thus be of profound concern to all of us that insects appear to be undergoing massive declines. As a child, I vividly remember my parents having to stop the car on long summer journeys to scrub clear the windscreen, which quickly became crusted with splatted insects as we drove along. Today, our windscreens are disturbingly clean.

The causes of insect declines are many: habitat loss to intensive farming, housing and other developments; the ever-growing blizzard of pesticides used by farmers and gardeners; climate change; light pollution; impacts of invasive species and more. Our tidy, pesticide-infused world is largely hostile to insect life.

This may all seem terribly depressing but do not despair. We may feel helpless in the face of many global environmental issues but, as I

explain in my book *Silent Earth*, we can all get involved in reversing insect declines. If you are lucky enough to have a garden, take some simple steps to invite insects and other wildlife in; it is astonishing how much life a small garden can support. If you have no garden, you might consider joining national and local campaigns to fill our urban greenspaces with wildflowers, or to have your town or village declared pesticide-free. Imagine every garden, park, cemetery, roundabout and road verge filled with swathes of wildflowers. We could create a national network of wildlife-rich habitat from Land's End to John O'Groats.

Of course we should not forget our farmland, which covers 70% of the UK. It is my view that the move towards ever-more intensive, pesticide-soaked monoculture farming is unsustainable; it has done terrible damage to our wildlife and soils, pollutes streams and rivers, and contributes a lot to greenhouse gas emissions. You can reduce your own impact and support more sustainable farming practices by buying and eating local, seasonal, organic produce, buying loose fruit and veg and reducing your meat consumption. Better still, grow what food you can in your garden or an allotment.

Love them or loathe them, we all need insects. We have to learn to live in harmony with nature, seeing ourselves as part of it, not trying to rule and control it with an iron fist. Our survival depends upon it, as does that of the glorious array of life with which we share our planet.



Dawn Cooper

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As we live through a time of great uncertainty, food security is an important issue. But it's vital we consider nature in any plans. Industrial agriculture has destroyed wildlife on a grand scale. Further intensification will be a huge blow for nature and climate, but also jeopardise long-term food security.



Learn more: [wtru.st/energy-food](http://wtru.st/energy-food)

**Dave Goulson** is a professor of biology at the University of Sussex, one of the UK's leading insect experts and an ambassador for The Wildlife Trusts. He champions insects in his latest book, *Silent Earth: Averting the Insect Apocalypse*. Get more tips on how to help insects at [wildlifetrusts.org/action-for-insects](http://wildlifetrusts.org/action-for-insects)



@DaveGoulson



@dave.goulson

# Creating an ark



Linda Palkin, 2020/15/20

**Freshwater crayfish have existed in Worcestershire and the UK for possibly thousands of years. Since the introduction of the non-native American signal crayfish in the 1970s and 1980s, however, our native white-clawed crayfish has become rare.**

Once common across Europe, white-clawed crayfish now face extinction wherever signal crayfish can be found. This invasive species is larger, breeds faster and is able to out compete white-clawed crayfish for food. Like grey squirrels, this American species carries a disease that is fatal to their European relatives and where the species meet, the indigenous ones usually suffer.

During periods of drought the crayfish can retreat into burrows excavated in soft banks around the deepest pools. Here they can survive in damp conditions for weeks. Crayfish are omnivorous and are often found amongst dead leaves and other vegetation, eating anything from dead organic matter to invertebrates. When confined, they are known to be cannibals!

## Citizen science in action

A citizen science project set up by the Severn Rivers Trust to look at the spread of signal crayfish in the Cradley and Leigh brooks has now been followed by another volunteer-led project to monitor the remaining native white-clawed crayfish around the Malvern Hills. Both projects have been supported by the Environment Agency and Malvern Hills AONB.

For reasons that are unclear, the small streams of Whippets and Careys brooks have remained clear of signal crayfish and a small population of white-clawed crayfish survives. The population is isolated from others and lives principally around the deeper pools where, by torchlight, animals can be seen foraging in the dark. Downstream surveys to the confluence with the River Severn below Worcester's Carrington Bridge show that the species appear to be absent from the floodplain.

White-clawed crayfish are listed as a priority species for conservation action in Worcestershire and although

the Malvern population is small, it is important in conservation terms. As a result, an ark site has been established, under license from Natural England and in co-operation with Madresfield Estate and the Earth Heritage Trust, in a disused limestone quarry that has several deep permanent pools. A large number of rescued crayfish from Shropshire, where some streams are now drying up every year, were relocated in August to this ark. If the crayfish breed successfully, the local Malvern population can be reinforced from here if necessary.



The Environment Agency would like to create further ark sites. If you own land with permanent pools or streams of clean water that are not connected to watercourses containing signal crayfish, please get in touch with us and we'll pass on your details to Keith.

**Keith Falconer**, WWT member.



Passionate about improving Worcestershire's biodiversity and helping people to access nature.



# Wild notebook



All photographs by Rosemary Winnall

★ STAR SPECIES



**Lemon slug**  
*Malacolimax tenellus*

Walking in winter woodland we spot a clump of nibbled butter cap toadstools and sense that we might be close to our quarry. A gentle feel underneath and yes, there is something smooth, soft and squidgy lurking there. We lift it out to admire our first lemon slug in this part of the forest, providing another dot on our distribution map. This enigmatic ancient woodland species spends most of its year underground feeding on fungal hyphae but comes up when toadstools appear, to mature, mate and then return to lay its eggs.

**Early bumblebee**  
*Bombus pratorum*

I pause by the garden wall in February sunshine and sense movement behind the leaves. A small bumblebee stirs and its red-ended abdomen helps to identify it. This queen will soon be ready to start her nest but first she must find some nectar to refresh herself after her winter's sleep.



**Green elfcups**  
*Chlorociboria aeruginascens*

Turquoise is an unusual colour to see in nature, which makes this fungus striking, especially when fruiting. It used to be inoculated into oak and the coloured wood used in marquetry and decorative woodwork called Tunbridge Ware. The process was noted as far back as the fourteenth century in Italy.



**Black bryony**  
*Dioscorea communis*

Like a hedgerow necklace in celebration of winter, this female plant has grown up through the vegetation (in an anti-clockwise direction) and now displays its conspicuous fruits. The berries are poisonous to us; I wonder which birds and small mammals feast on these without ill effect.



**Daddy long legs spider**  
*Pholcus phalangioides*

These spiders, which arrived in the UK about 30 years ago, love warm houses and are not found out-of-doors. When I watch them after dark they vibrate violently when disturbed and can run surprisingly quickly to catch their prey as it tangles in their webbing. They can be cannibalistic!



**Great scented liverwort**  
*Conocephalum conicum*

Our river quayside has a shimmer of green growing along the stonework. I clamber down and break a piece off to smell it. It has a strong, pleasant and distinctive aroma and obvious air pores that help to identify it. I've seen mute swans feeding on this when they hungry in winter.

**Oak leaves in frost**

I walk out into the park searching for nature's art in winter. I look around for spider webs, silhouettes against the sky, coloured winter twigs, sporing mosses, seedheads and developing buds. But the crunch under my feet draws my gaze downwards to something beautiful below. I might easily have missed it.



**Little egret** *Egretta garzetta*

With delight I welcome the little egret back to our local river for the winter and spot its characteristic bright yellow feet. These birds first re-appeared in England in 1989 but were common residents in medieval times. They were cooked and served at the coronation feast for Henry VI in 1429.



**Rosemary Winnall**, WWT member. Rosemary is interested in all aspects of wildlife, especially when linked to the Wyre Forest!



# Six places to see ravens

Ravens are the largest members of the crow family, as big as a buzzard. They were once found across the UK, but persecution reduced them to small populations in the north and west. Fortunately, ravens have made an incredible comeback and can be seen more widely again, though they are still rarer in the east of England and Scotland. They're often encountered in uplands and on coastal cliffs. You can tell a raven from a crow by its heavier bill, thicker neck, and hoarse, cronking call. In flight, they have a distinctively

diamond-shaped tail. On winter evenings, ravens gather in communal roosts that can include hundreds of birds. These are often young ravens, as breeding pairs are busy holding their nesting territory. Look out for their tumbling, acrobatic display flights in late winter and early spring.

*Did you spot any corvids?*

We'd love to know how your search went. Please tweet us your best photos!

• @wildlifetrusts

• @WorcsWT



## See the spectacle for yourself

### 1. Whitelee Moor, Northumberland Wildlife Trust

Large numbers of ravens can be seen on this moorland nature reserve. The open skies are also great for spotting birds of prey like peregrine falcons and buzzards. You can sometimes find a herd of feral goats on the border with Kielderhead.

**Where:** Byrness, NE19 1TZ

### 2. Howe Ridding Wood, Cumbria Wildlife Trust

This ancient woodland is home to a winter roost of ravens, with up to 30 of the cronking corvids often seen over the nature reserve. Other impressive birds you could spy include buzzards and sparrowhawks.

**Where:** Between Kendal and Grange over Sands, LA11 6SB

### 3. Blacka Moor, Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust

Ravens are a common sight on this spectacular stretch of moorland and woodland, part of the internationally important wild landscape of the Eastern Peak District Moors. As you search for ravens, keep an eye out for the more easily spotted red deer – the UK's largest land mammal.

**Where:** Near Sheffield, S11 7TY

### 4. Silent Valley, Gwent Wildlife Trust

An ancient woodland sanctuary in the South Wales Valleys. With panoramic views across the Ebbw Valley, there's plenty of sky to scan for the distinctive silhouette of a raven. The nature reserve also boasts Britain's highest beech wood!

**Where:** Ebbw Vale, NP23 7RX

### 5. Cwm Colhuw, Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales

This mix of grassland, woodland and scrub is a great place to see the ravens that live on the Glamorgan Heritage Coast. You might also spot a peregrine plunging after prey or a kestrel hovering over the grassland.

**Where:** Llantwit Major, CF61 1RF

### 6. Riverside Valley Park, Devon Wildlife Trust

You don't have to travel to rural areas to see ravens! They're a daily sight at this park close to the centre of Exeter. Here they perch on pylons rather than rugged cliffs.

**Where:** Exeter, EX2 6LT

## Worcestershire's ravens

**After moving to Battenhall in Worcester 12 years ago, I was amazed to find that ravens were regular visitors to conifers behind my flat. Hearing the deep 'cronks' and seeing these majestic birds at close quarters (dwarfing the neighbouring crows) generated a string of intriguing questions. Previous encounters with ravens had been restricted to remote hill and coastal areas, so what had brought them here, within a half mile of the city centre? The local paper then reported that another Battenhall resident had found an injured juvenile nearby. He was already familiar with our 'urban ravens' so we teamed up to keep records.**

By now I was well into an MSc course in Ornithology at Birmingham University that demanded a research project for the final year dissertation. The choice for me was easy. Raven populations in lowland England were expanding rapidly so I looked into the factors driving the increases. From

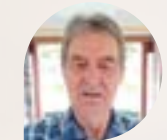
this, I learned that other western cities had hosted ravens since 1996 and that growth in the Welsh breeding population had kick-started the easterly spread into English counties, probably including Worcestershire. When the course finished in 2013 its founder encouraged me to continue my raven studies locally (Professor Graham Martin, vice-chair of the Trust).

I began annual visits to Worcestershire's reported breeding sites in 2016, recording my observations in the Worcestershire Record, the journal of the Worcestershire Recorders. Luckily, readers sent details of many other sites and the survey's reliability has improved each year. The county now seems to support 20 to 25 breeding pairs but there must be others yet to be discovered and the 'real' number remains elusive. The nest sites of choice are large conifers, many of which were planted in large private grounds as ornamental features by our forebears. Hence, Worcestershire ravens are often found in high-end

properties! Urban environments are no deterrent and during last winter one particular raven spent his/her days on a city centre night club and the Salvation Army church.

The more time I spend observing ravens, the more fascinating they become. Their reputation for intelligence is well deserved and social relationships are sophisticated and complex. I have seen them distinguish safe, familiar humans from unwelcome strangers (like me) in their territories and the strategies for protecting their naïve offspring. For the future, I will continue the surveys and hopefully research some of the mysteries of raven 'language' but in the meantime please let me know of any potential nest sites near you via [mikebirder@hotmail.com](mailto:mikebirder@hotmail.com).

Many thanks.



**Mike Metcalf,**

WWT member, is a keen birder with a special interest in ravens.



# Winter Wildlife Gardening

**Our gardens all but go to sleep in winter, as plants become dormant and most species are overwintering, but there are still ways to help your garden wildlife.**

Hedgehogs and amphibians may be tucked beneath a large pile of leaves or in your compost heap, while insects may be sheltering beneath tree bark, in

the folds of spent leaves and seedheads, or amongst leaf litter. Avoid disturbing these habitats until mid-spring as any interruptions could cost valuable energy that isn't easy to replenish at this time of year; insects may also be vulnerable to fungal diseases if exposed to damp conditions.

Indeed, the best thing you can do for most wildlife at this time of year is to not garden at all! Leave plants in borders to rot down into themselves, avoid clearing leaf litter from your garden's edges (but do sweep leaves off paths and the lawn)

and leave habitats such as log piles and compost heaps intact. If you have a meadow or other area of long grass, leave a 'buffer zone' uncut throughout winter, so caterpillars, beetles and other invertebrates can shelter in the thatch.

Of course, not all animals hibernate. Birds battle through the short days and cold nights, searching for food that's often hard to come by. If you have fruit trees, like crab apples, let windfall fruit remain on the ground so thrushes such as redwings and fieldfares can help themselves. If the ground isn't frozen, you can add to your collection of fruit and berrying trees. Now's the time to buy bare-root trees and shrubs – hawthorn, rowan, holly, apples, crab apples and pyracantha all produce fruit loved by birds, while birches and alder, along with plants such as Verbena bonariensis, lavender and teasels, offer seeds for a wide range of smaller species.

Filling supplementary feeders benefits smaller species like tits, which need to feed almost constantly in the daylight hours. Calorie-rich food such as fat balls, sunflower hearts and peanuts gives them the energy they need to shiver to keep warm at night. Leave scraps of seed at the back of borders for ground-feeding species like wrens. And don't forget water – not only do bird baths provide drinking water but by regularly topping up your bird bath you will also help birds to clean their feathers and regulate their temperature, vital on cold winter nights.

Do make sure you keep bird baths and feeders clean, as the number and variety of birds visiting them can spread diseases. Regular cleaning can help keep your garden birds healthy.

Get more wildlife-friendly gardening tips at [wildlifetrusts.org/gardening](http://wildlifetrusts.org/gardening)



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





# Wild snaps

Be part of our 2024 calendar!

If you think you've captured the beauty of Worcestershire's wildlife or wild places or if you've taken an unusual or fun angle that will inspire a love of our natural world, why not enter our photo competition.

Whether you watch wildlife on a nature reserve, in our towns and countryside or in your own garden, keep a camera close to hand to capture the action.

Twelve lucky photographers will win an A4 space in our 2024 calendar and a copy each of the calendar. Runner's-up images also feature in the calendar and, of course, all entries help us to promote Worcestershire's fantastic wildlife.

We all get involved in judging and are delighted to be joined again by Pete Walkden [www.petewalkden.co.uk](http://www.petewalkden.co.uk) and Jason Curtis [www.wyrewildlife.co.uk](http://www.wyrewildlife.co.uk) to help with the difficult final decisions.

## Don't forget:

- **Do no harm** – the welfare of the wildlife and the wild place comes first.
- **Don't get too close** – let birds feed their young and move on if they're agitated.
- **Watch your feet** – stay on paths, don't trample flowers to reach more flowers.
- **Know the law** – familiarise yourself with protected species and the laws that protect them.
- **Know the lure** – don't use recordings to attract birds, they can disrupt behaviour and risk the lives of chicks.

## Top tips from our judges

- Learn more about your subject to know when and how to safely take the photo for both you and the subject (keeping a diary can be helpful).
- Try to capture the 'moment'.
- Pay attention to light and background.
- Try photographing in all weathers to help add something different to your images.
- Practice, even if it's on something you wouldn't ordinarily take a photo of.

## How to enter

Visit [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/photography-competition](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/photography-competition) to upload up to six images – you'll need to tell us who you are and where the images were taken. Full terms and conditions are on the website.

**Closing date:** Tuesday 11th April 2023



Ira James

# Your letters

We'd love to hear from you! Please send your letters to [editor@worcestershireswildlifetrust.org](mailto:editor@worcestershireswildlifetrust.org)

Geoff Franklin



## Bee-riliant

Four or five years ago I spent half an hour with a drill and some scrap wood making a bee hotel. Two holes got used that year but then something (a woodpecker?) dug them out and I tacked some netting on to protect it.

Since then the box has stayed empty but this year I've got a full house!

A bee hotel doesn't have to be fancy. Just drill some holes (6mm diameter) in some wood and screw it to a sunny wall.

**Geoff Franklin**

Andrew Reid



## What is this?

I found this curled in a perfect spiral on the underside of a pussy willow sapling I have in a pot in the garden. It looks velvety with no markings. It woke up, ate voraciously, then went into this sausage spiral. I can't find it in my butterfly, moth and caterpillar book.

**Ruth Kirwan**

*Ed. This is a larva of one of the Trichiosoma species of sawfly.*

## Dinner

Taken in back garden through kitchen window.

**Peter Humby**

Peter Humby



Dirk Perry

## Changing of the guard

I love watching the avocets at Upton Warren.

**Dirk Perry**

## KEEP IN TOUCH

✉ Sign up to our e-newsletter: [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/e-newsletter](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/e-newsletter)

📘 [www.facebook.com/worcestershireswildlifetrust](https://www.facebook.com/worcestershireswildlifetrust)

🐦 @WorcsWT

📺 [www.flickr.com/groups/worcestershireswildlifetrust](https://www.flickr.com/groups/worcestershireswildlifetrust)

📺 [www.youtube.com/c/WorcsWildlifeTrustUK1](https://www.youtube.com/c/WorcsWildlifeTrustUK1)

## Social feeds



Karen Barker

Trench Wood on Monday (migrant hawk) 📺 Karen Barker



Lloyd Evans

Devil's-bit scabious, such an essential late summer nectar plant. Grafton Woods, Worcestershire. 📺 @EcolaEvans



Anil Patel

Otter spotting confirmed! Twenty-four hours later, same location but a little closer & better! [Worcester]

📺 @Freedom\_Capture

## Red kite

Red kite seen hunting over Bournheath north of Bromsgrove. This is my first reliable sighting in this area.

**Peter Hawcroft**





**Worcestershire**  
Wildlife Trust

On Wednesday David helped us build safe havens for otters.

On Thursday David helped us create woodland glades, perfect for butterflies.

On Friday, David helped us buy a wildflower meadow to protect it for forever.

In April it will be six years since David died.

**By leaving a gift to the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust in his Will, David found a simple yet powerful way to keep his wishes alive. You can do the same.**

**If you would like to talk to someone in confidence about leaving a gift in your Will, please contact Mike on 01905 754919 or [mike@worcestershirowildlifetrust.org](mailto:mike@worcestershirowildlifetrust.org).**

**Find out more at [www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/legacy](http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/legacy)**

