

Worcestershire **WILDLIFE**



Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust





Welcome

This will be my last contribution to the magazine as I step down after 38 years working for Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. It has been a great honour to lead the Trust's work for the last 30 years and I shall be very sad to leave. More importantly, though, I am absolutely delighted that Mike Perry has been appointed as the Trust's new CEO to lead our fantastic team of staff and volunteers; I know that the Trust will prosper more than ever under his leadership.

A science background enabled me to start a career in nature conservation in 1982. At the time I was focused very much on nature reserves, which remain fundamental to achieving nature's recovery. However, whilst science, evidence, processes and resources are required to underpin all that we do, ultimately every aspect of the Trust's work relies on people to make it happen. That requires mutual trust and respect – often hard to win and easy to lose. It means building positive relationships, both internally and externally, but also knowing when to stand up and be counted when it really matters.

Knowing that there are at least 25,000 people who directly support the Trust's mission to make Worcestershire a better place for wildlife and for people has been my constant inspiration. It would be invidious to mention individuals because there are so many people I wish to thank for their support, challenge, courage, knowledge, energy, enthusiasm and sheer hard work – staff members, trustees, volunteers, partners and, of course, members. Without you, nothing the Trust does would be possible and I know that Mike Perry can count on your continued support however you give it.

Colin Raven, Director

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Wendy Carter

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Paul Lane

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust *Get in touch*

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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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Vice Chair: Tom Meikle
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Six ways to get involved with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Donate From purchasing land to protecting wildlife, exciting projects near you need your support.
worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/donate

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

Local groups Join one of our six local groups to help make a difference and meet like-minded people.
worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/local-groups

Events Discover Worcestershire's wildlife while meeting like-minded people worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on

Shop Check our online shop for cards, calendars and gifts – all proceeds help our work.
worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/shop

Leave a legacy If you've had a lifetime's pleasure from nature, help ensure its future by leaving us a gift in your Will. worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/legacy

Our **wild** farm



Wendy Carter

Working from a damp portacabin, which flooded during heavy rain, by Droitwich canal was not the most auspicious of headquarters for the Trust in the late 1980s. But that was where Colin Raven found himself when he arrived as reserves officer, contemplating wildlife opportunities for Worcestershire. Luckily for Colin, things were about to get better. A rental agreement with Worcestershire County Council for Lower Smite farmhouse and two hectares of land was settled and the Trust moved into refurbished farmhouse offices in 1990.

Space for tools and machinery, a kitchen and dry rooms might have been enough for some but not for our trustees. An eager eye was kept on the barns and fields adjoining the farmhouse that had been sold separately to what was then Hindlip College of Agriculture. When the livestock barns and over 62 hectares of land came up for sale after the closure of the college, the Trust seized the opportunity to think big. Expanding and buffering the original small piece of land, the purchase was completed in 2001.

This exciting investment was the start of the transformation of unrenovated buildings into a nature conservation management hub and it put the land management on a trajectory of keeping what was already special for nature whilst allowing us to make plans for farming, wildlife and sharing experiences and learning with children and adults.

Read on as Helen Woodman, our Head of Conservation, dives into the past, present and future of the Trust's HQ.



Thanks to you
**Lower Smite Farm
is helping us to help
wildlife on farms
across the county**

Magpie Bank, 2003



Laura Steel

Magpie Bank, 2024



Wendy Carter

The numbers of common whitethroats have risen from two to over 20 singing males.



Simon Pugsley

The farm diaries for 1908 to 1919 give us an account of how the land was managed during World War One when food security was low and wildlife was still aplenty.

In 1910, 114 years ago, the new tenant of Lower Smite Farm purchased two four-year-old heavy horses and an ageing mare for £88 to do the bulk of the heavy work, such as cultivation and planting. The farm's small dairy unit exported milk to the local community and dung was the mainstay in terms of maintaining fertility. A new flock of 60 ewes were put to the two new rams.

Meanwhile, £25 had to be spent on controlling an infestation of 440 wild rabbits. The farm grew mangles (a form of turnip), cabbages, winter beans, oats, winter wheat and potatoes. Hay was made from the grassland and cider was produced from the orchard. In the spring, large numbers of lapwing settled on the fallow and

grassland in such great numbers that their eggs were collected and sold.

Just four years later, at a time just before tractors were to revolutionise farming, in August 1914, the War Office commandeered the strongest two of the now five horses (paying £95), leaving two inexperienced three-year-olds and the old mare. Farming was hard, back-breaking work, even with the arrival of tractors to replace the horse, and remained so beyond the end of World War Two food rationing into the 1950s.

Putting wildlife first

Skip forward to more recent times and the agricultural college maintained a mixed usage of arable crop rotation alongside temporary and permanent grassland. From 2001 the Trust initially continued this 'business as usual' with some arable cropping and cow and sheep grazing. There were few cross-field hedges, only fence lines, so hedge

management was minimal. The work was carried out under an agreement with the Hills, our neighbouring farmers.

In 2006 we made the bold move to employ Caroline Corsie, a farming and agriculture officer with agronomy skills, to help us understand more about soil management and crop production. The new management plan focused on restoring soil health and meeting the key needs of farmland wildlife – adequate food, nesting habitat, winter habitat and low stress. We wanted to work alongside land managers to explore techniques and land use in order to halt the general decline in farmland wildlife and increase resilience to climate change. This is a win-win formula – wildlife needs space to adapt and move in order to cope with climate change whilst farmers are increasingly faced with unpredictable weather patterns that impact profitability, planning and resource use.

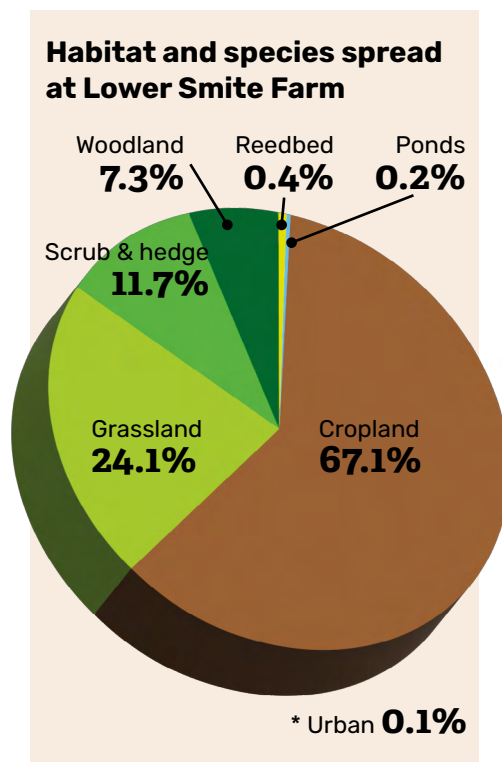


Lower Smite Farm
stable and barn, 2003



Volunteers play
an integral role in
managing the farm

Lower Smite Farm
stable and barn, 2020



Corn buttercup

Half the farm was converted to management under organic standards, all sown and grown without the use of insecticides, molluscicides, pesticides or fertilisers. Half became an opportunity for testing the response of the soil, worms and pollinating insects to blocks of flowering plants, crops and grassland that would provide cover and food for wildlife through the seasons. A new orchard was planted with apple and plum varieties that have been traditionally grown in Worcestershire.

Sensitive rotations of the ground saw the emergence of a variety of rare arable flora, including corn buttercup (critically endangered) and spreading hedge parsley (endangered). Smite is now nationally important for the existing assemblage for arable flora.

A new lease of life

At the same time this was all developing, we also began a programme of major

building works on the old dairy, barn, cowshed, pig pen, hayloft and livestock shelter barn that had come into our ownership.

Out of the first phase we created airy, modern meeting spaces that provided opportunities for the newly formed education team to bring children of all ages to the farm to participate in activities focussed on learning about wildlife and our natural environment. Over 20 years at least 90,000 children from across Worcestershire have explored nature and you can read more about our future plans on pages 20–21.

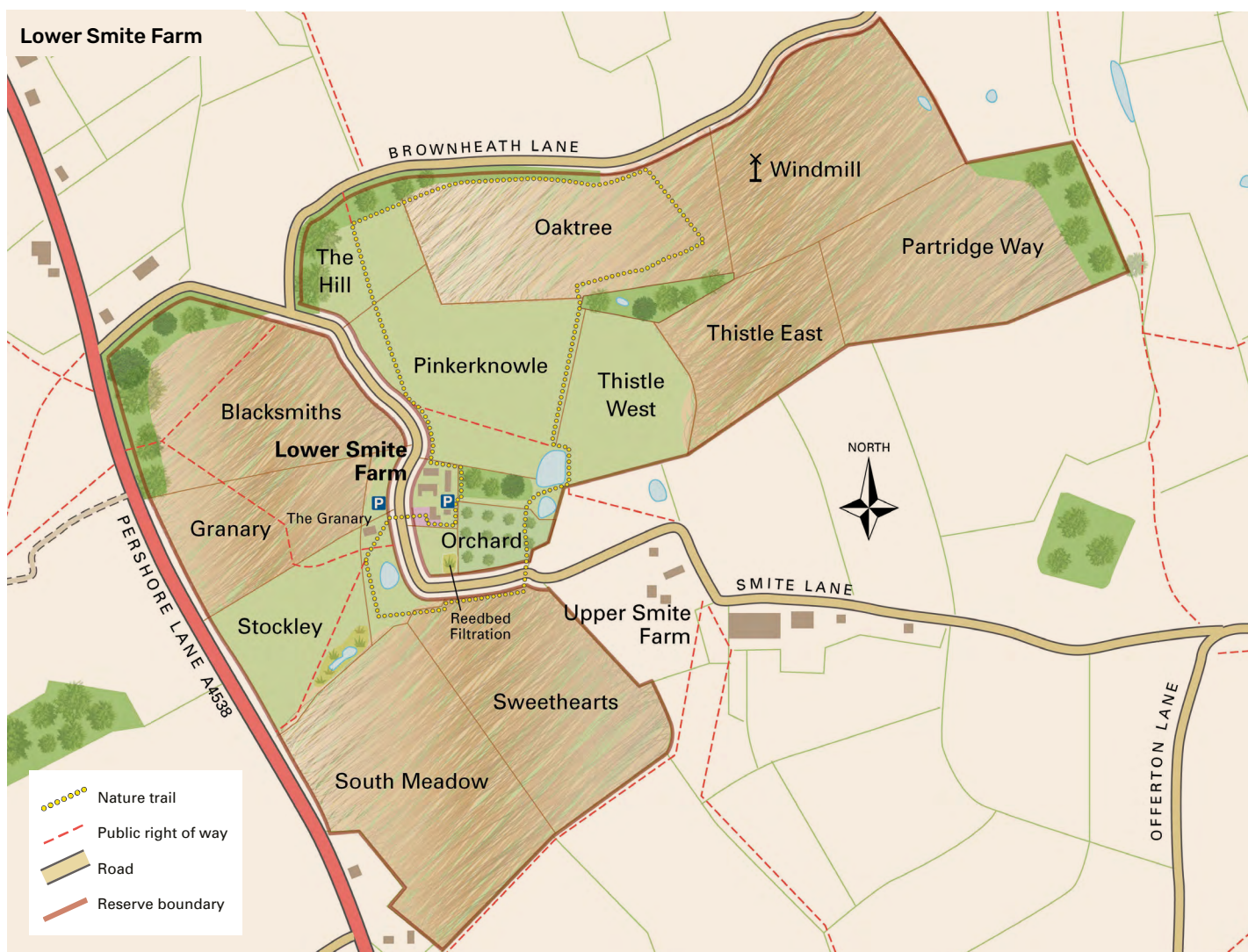
Making the rooms available for external organisations to book meetings and conferences at Smite has provided a valuable source of income as well as offering an interesting place to meet. The space has proved invaluable for our own purposes too; we have room to run volunteer conferences, AGMs, award ceremonies, events like craft fayres and training for all our colleagues.

The livestock barn, once open to the elements apart from a roof and a few half walls, is now a meeting place for volunteers and staff where we can store vehicles and maintain tools and machinery. More recently we installed electric vehicle charging points in the barn and in the car park.

Connecting the dots

There are over 6.5km of hedges and 1km of wet ditches and scrapes connecting the fields within the farm to the surrounding farmland. From ancient hedgerows to those recently coppiced and newly planted, all hedges are buffered from farming activities by a variety of six-metre margins that include sown tussocky grass and cultivated margins for arable flora. We manage the hedges on a varied rotation and the hedge bottoms are managed to encourage a diversity of wildflowers.

The marginal areas of field corners



and wet areas have been allowed to naturally regenerate towards scrub so there's plenty of hawthorn and bramble for wildlife. We planted nearly three hectares of woodland in two blocks in 2009 and these are developing a varied structure. Wild bird seed and pollen nectar mixes are planted throughout the farm and supplement food and habitat availability for many species.

Our garden in front of the farmhouse has been transformed from a grassy area to an accessible garden with raised beds of flowers and vegetables, a pond, fruit trees and flowery grassland. This is used for our school programmes and for showing visitors some of the wildlife-friendly options they could use in their own gardens.

Tessa's and orchard ponds, and their surrounding wild areas, provide important habitats for many creatures including great crested newts, slow-worms, frogs, toads and various

damselflies and dragonflies. A wide variety of invertebrates have been recorded that contribute to the success of the seven species of bats inhabiting farmland buildings and foraging across the different habitats of the farm.

The future

There have been a lot of changes at Lower Smite Farm and we have learnt, and continue to learn, how wildlife and people respond to our management and what they see here. We're always seeking to improve what we do and are currently looking at the feasibility of installing solar panels on the farm buildings to lower our carbon emissions and our heating costs. As you can see from the photos, we've made a huge difference to the landscape in the last 20 years – what will Lower Smite Farm look like in another 20 years' time?



Want to know more?

Visit our Christmas craft fair on Saturday 23rd November and take a walk around the nature trail www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/events/2024-11-23-christmas-craft-fair

Buy your Christmas cards and more from our small shop, open Mon-Fri 9am-5pm www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/nature-reserves/lower-smite-farm

Book a meeting room for your business www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/conference-venue-meeting-rooms



Helen Woodman,
WWT Head of Conservation.
My love of nature began because I loved being active outside in all weathers.



Round-keeled
Rhyzobius

Do nothing!

Do nothing for insects this winter. It sounds rather contradictory, doesn't it? However, sometimes in conservation, less is more.

As winter is upon us, the green leaves and vibrant flowers of summer have wilted and fallen, leaving leaf litter, dried seed heads and stems in their place. To a meticulous gardener, this may all be unsightly but these leftover remnants of plants hold so much value to wildlife.

Look closely and you'll find that insects will make the most of your garden, even in the colder months. Seedheads can be particularly important, with insects hiding amongst the ruffles of the seeds. Take the tiny round-keeled *Rhyzobius* ladybird, for example, that will snuggle amongst the seeds until the weather warms. Moth larvae, such as teasel marble, nestle within the plant's cavities.

Other species aren't quite as fussy; patchwork leaf-cutter bees will lay eggs within hollow plant stems and adult green shieldbugs, camouflaged by their brown winter colouring, will make themselves at home amongst a warm

blanket of dried grasses and leaf litter. Log piles, often abandoned on the edges of lawns, provide warm and secure shelters for beetles and invertebrates like woodlice. By refraining from tidying your garden and not deadheading all plants this winter, you'll be providing vital habitats for these brilliant bugs.

With 41% of insects facing extinction, a sympathetic, more lenient approach to gardening is needed more than ever before. These small creatures are crucial to maintaining life-cycles within the natural world; from stimulating new life through pollination to breaking down dead matter. Insect decline also has a devastating impact on other wildlife, as evidenced by the dramatic decrease in insectivorous birds such as cuckoos, nightingales and spotted flycatchers. Once a more common sight, populations of these birds have dropped by over 75% since the 1960s.

'Gardens cover over 10 million acres – more than all of Britain's national nature reserves combined.'

Poor quality habitats, such as neat and tidy gardens and roadside verges, are contributing to the loss of insects. Private gardens are estimated to cover over 10 million acres, which is more than all of Britain's national nature reserves combined. Imagine the difference we could make if we all left a few patches a bit wilder and stopped the use of harmful pesticides and chemicals. Insects would have more spaces to feed, rest and nest, giving numbers a much-needed boost.

There is, of course, an additional benefit to doing nothing in your garden this winter – it's considerably less effort!



Help insects near you
www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/action-insects



Shauna McLaren,
WWT Digital and Communications Officer. My love of nature began on annual family holidays to more rural parts of Scotland.

Local news

Double your donation Protecting Worcestershire's Rainforests

Thank you for your support for our fundraising appeal to buy land next to the very special Hanley Dingle nature reserve. At the time of going to press you've helped us to raise more than £80,000 towards the £470,000 needed.

There's time for one final push and the chance for donations made between 3rd and 10th December to be doubled as part of the Big Give Christmas

Challenge. Any donations made via The Big Give's website will be doubled, giving us the chance to raise an extra £18,800.

Hanley Dingle, in the Teme Valley, is reminiscent of a rainforest and one of Worcestershire's last woodland wildernesses. It's just 22 hectares in size so the opportunity to buy 16 hectares of neighbouring farmland will allow us to almost double the size and create a raft

of new habitats to bolster the resilience of this delicate site.

You can find out more about the land and our vision at **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/appeals/protecting-worcestershires-rainforests** but to double your donation, you must donate via **<https://bit.ly/BGCCHanleyD>** between midday on 3rd and midday on 10th December.

Hanley Dingle nature reserve



Dominique Cragg

Thanks to you
We are on the
way to raising the
£470,000
we need

'This is the kingdom of the mosses, the ferns and the liverworts and that, combined with the ancient woodland, gives rise to a huge amount of biodiversity that calls this place its home.'

Tiddesley Wood update

You may recall that there has been a planning application for 300 houses on land adjacent to Tiddesley Wood nature reserve. As your magazine was being printed, we were attending a public inquiry into this application. The inspector's findings will be published in due course and we'll update you when we can.



Jess Morrison

Surveying mosquitoes

Following the detection of Usutu virus in England in blackbirds and bird-biting mosquitoes, the Trust has taken part in the Snapshot Mosquito Surveillance programme, a national survey of mosquito populations, to further understand risks to humans and wild birds from mosquito-borne viruses.

Jess, one of our conservation trainees (after reassurance that she wouldn't be the bait), undertook two trapping sessions at Upton Warren Wetland Reserve. Using a trap with a lure designed to mimic bird and mammal hosts, mosquitoes were enticed into and trapped inside a sample container. This was removed after three nights and posted for analysis. The trap is designed to specifically capture mosquitoes and, as it has no light source, does not attract moths.

Events near you

There are plenty of walks, talks, day trips and activities taking place across the county. If you've not been to one before, you'll find a warm welcome and like-minded people to share your experience with.

- Thursday 5 December – **Wildlife of Finland** (talk) with Malvern Local Group.
- Wednesday 11 December – **Quiz night** with Redditch Local Group.
- Sunday 15 December – **Wandering our way around Wilden Top** (walk) with Wyre Forest Local Group.
- Wednesday 8 January – **A Year on Bredon Hill** (talk) with Southeast Worcestershire Local Group.
- Monday 10 February – **Piper's Hill and Dodderhill Common nature reserve** (talk) with Bromsgrove and NE Worcestershire Local Group.
- Friday 28 February – **Life on the edge: between a water vole and a hard place** (talk) with Stourbridge and Hagley Local Group.



Simon Hislam

House sparrow

Recording wildlife

Many thanks to those of you who submitted your sightings of wildlife following our feature about the importance of recording the wildlife you see. Our Wildlife Sightings scheme is on track to receive over 600 sightings this year to add to the county database, managed by Worcestershire Biological Records Centre.

Want to know more about how to record the wildlife you see? Visit www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings



Colin Raven and Mike Perry

New Chief Executive Officer

After 38 years with the Trust, almost 30 of those at the helm, Colin Raven has taken the decision to step down at the end of the year (see page 2). Mike Perry, the Trust's current Head of Resources, has been appointed to the role and will take up the position in January.

Christianne Tipping, Chair of trustees, said 'Worcestershire Wildlife Trust would not be the respected and effective organisation it is today without Colin's leadership, foresight and energy. He has overseen the expansion of the Trust's reserves, steered the growth of the organisation from humble beginnings to a 40-strong team of professionals and created a culture in which relationships between staff, trustees, volunteers, members, supporters and external partners have thrived.

'We are immensely grateful to Colin for investing so much of himself into the Trust and we wish him all the very best in his next chapter.

'We are delighted to have appointed Mike Perry as Colin's successor. From a field of very strong candidates, Mike came out on top, proffering a personal vision and plan for the future that builds on the solid foundation Colin leaves behind. The Trust is going to be in very safe hands and my fellow trustees and I look forward very much to working with Mike.'



Wildlife Heroes

We're relaunching Wildlife Heroes to celebrate the incredible things that people are doing for wildlife right across the county.

Almost 100 Wildlife Heroes joined us at awards ceremonies in 2018, 2019 and 2020 and we're keen to meet the next group of wildlife enthusiasts.

If you know someone who's making a difference for wildlife, please nominate them. They could be individuals or

groups. They might be doing something in their own garden or enthusing communities to do something in their green space. Whoever they are or whatever they're doing, if they're giving wildlife a helping hand, why not help us to recognise and celebrate their achievements.

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-heroes

Raffle winners


Our raffle ticket sales brought in over £6,600 this year – many thanks to everyone who bought tickets. The lucky winners are:

- 1st Mrs & Mr K. & N. Warner
- 2nd Mr M. Addison
- 3rd Mr D. & Mrs L. Thursfield
- 4th Mrs J. Potter
- 5th Mrs J. & Mr D. Bridgewater
- 6th Mrs B. Taylor
- 7th Mrs H. M. Gill

Calling all birders, botanists and nature-lovers

We're now on Instagram and Bluesky so do look us up and follow us for the latest wild news.

 <https://www.instagram.com/worcswt/>

 <https://bsky.app/profile/worcswt.bsky.social>

If you're on Facebook, X, YouTube or Flickr check us out and give us a follow, a like or a share.



New moths

Two species of moth new to the county have been found on Trust nature reserves.

A larva of the usually coastal micro moth common sea groundling *Scrobipalpa nitentella* was discovered at Upton Warren's The Flashes in August 2022 by Patrick Clement. It was feeding on orache, a coastal saltmarsh plant that grows in abundance in the saline conditions at Upton Warren.

Meanwhile, in September 2023

Nigel Voaden called into Tiddesley Wood and found mines in blackthorn leaves caused by a striped bent-wing *Lyonetia prunifoliella* moth. Some species of moths and other insects create tunnels, known as mines, as they feed between the upper and lower surfaces of leaves. This attractive species of moth has been recolonising the south and west coasts of England and has since been found in two more locations in Worcestershire.



Lyonetia prunifoliella

Oliver Wadsworth



Digital magazine

Your magazine is available as a pdf if you'd rather read it digitally. Why not download a copy to give it a try; you can let us know how you'd prefer to receive it using the short form on the download page.

Take a look **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/magazineNov24**

UK news

Nature's recovery powered by communities

In two years, the UK-wide Nextdoor Nature project, backed by a £5 million grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, has empowered over 400 communities to restore and enhance nature in their local areas.

At the heart of Nextdoor Nature is the dedication to equipping individuals and communities with the skills and resources needed to take meaningful environmental action.

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

Take a look at how Nextdoor Nature has helped communities in Bromsgrove and Redditch:

- People in Astwood Bank have been giving swifts a helping hand www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wild-communities-astwood-bank
- A community garden is underway in Charford www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wild-communities-charford-community-garden
- Nailpassers' Corner is being transformed for people and wildlife www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wild-communities-nailpassers-corner
- A new group is surveying a piece of land in Webheath before improving it for wildlife www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/community-action/wild-communities-webheath-community-group

UK HIGHLIGHTS

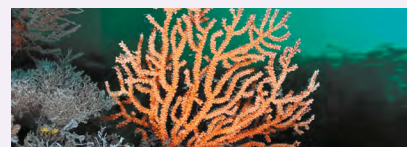
Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 Pink sea fans

Off the Alderney coast, citizen scientists are collecting small tissue samples of pink sea fans. Research by Alderney Wildlife Trust, University of Exeter and Jersey Marine Conservation is assessing their genetic connectivity across the rocky reefs of the Channel Islands.

wtru.st/PinkSeaFans



Linda Pitkin/2020VISION

Massive carbon stores in UK seabeds

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

The Blue Carbon Mapping Project, completed by the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) on behalf of The Wildlife Trusts, WWF and the RSPB, finds that 244 million tonnes of organic carbon are stored in just the top 10 centimetres of seabed sediments plus coastal habitats. The reports identify bottom trawling and offshore energy installation as the biggest potential threats to blue carbon stores.

Together, we are calling on governments across the UK to strengthen protections for the most valuable and vulnerable blue carbon stores.



Find out more at <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/blue-carbon>

Sir David Attenborough celebrates 60 years with The Wildlife Trusts



Broni Lloyd-Edwards

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

Charles Rothschild founded the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (now The Wildlife Trusts). He was ahead of his time in recognising the need to protect natural habitats and the wildlife that lived there.

Worcestershire's nature reserves

We haven't been letting the grass grow under our feet on our reserves this year and it's been a great growth year for our team.

As mentioned in your summer magazine, we are expanding our boundaries once more, this time in the Teme Valley with a fundraising appeal to purchase neighbouring land. The intention is to expand our Hanley Dingle nature reserve with a mosaic of woodland planting, pools, scrub and glades full of wildflowers, strengthening the connections throughout the landscape and enriching what is currently there. This will build the resilience of Hanley Dingle itself, a wonderfully unusual place of humid valleys, brooks and impenetrable vegetation, and is part of the Trust's 30 by 30 strategy to protect 30% of the UK for wildlife by 2030. We're very excited

by this and you can read more about how to help on page 10.

This adds to our similar ongoing projects at Green Farm, where we'll be planting woodland and orchard trees this winter, and the heathland restoration at Dropping Well Farm, five years in and showing the first signs of developing the acidic grassland that will be the precursor for the return of proper heathland. All these projects are substantial areas of land in their own right as well as helping to expand and strengthen existing nature reserves. Alongside our work with other landowners, we really are on the road to creating a thriving Worcestershire for wildlife.

We believe this is an essential part of nature's recovery and we are developing other projects that we hope to be able to share with you soon.



Tree house for bats

Last magazine, I mentioned the appearance of a large crack along a substantial part of the main track leading down to The Knapp and Papermill. Finding a viable solution has been a challenge but we believe we've now found a way forward, although the expected cost is likely to be in the region of £60,000. Expensive, yes, but absolutely key to the safe management of and access to the reserve and we hope that we can undertake the work this winter.

While this has affected our ability to take hay cuts and graze parts of the reserve this year, we're still helping wildlife there. One project we're particularly excited about is the conversion of an old tree house in the woods into a bat-friendly structure to support the existing populations of bats.

You can read more about this at <https://bit.ly/TrHse4Bats>

Possible pine marten

At Tiddesley Wood, we've had several reports of a possible first pine marten in the wood and are trying to confirm its presence. It would be wonderful for the species to have spread from reintroductions in Wales and the Forest of Dean and it would be a good sign that our management of the reserve is working well. We're not getting too excited until we get proof but please keep your eyes open and let us know if you have a sighting when visiting.

We are also updating the nature trail at Tiddesley. We have seen an increase in new, unofficial paths appearing in the wood, entering previously quiet areas. We are concerned about the disturbance this is creating for wildlife so along with improving the marking of the main trail, we've begun to block some of these unofficial trails, starting in the south of the wood. Whilst we don't want to spoil the enjoyment of visitors, wildlife must come first on a nature reserve.

Sowing seeds of change

Thankfully, we've finally had some dry weather, which has given us a window to get onto our arable sites to plant crops, management that's undertaken at Lower Smite Farm, Naunton Court Fields and Dropping Well Farm. Wildlife Trusts are not traditional farmers in that we don't focus on human food production. You could argue, however, that we are very traditional in that our core approach, where we have crops, is not to use fertilisers, fungicides or herbicides. We have several aims on our arable reserves:

- To promote arable 'weeds', rarer wildflowers that used to grow alongside crops, such as poppies or corn buttercup, and are difficult to maintain in small islands where they are left.
- To improve and demonstrate the value of good soil management.
- To create food for birds and insects.

The last two years have been very difficult for arable crops, too wet or too dry at varying times, and we have had poor growth or crop failure in that time. With the dry late summer, we are hoping for good bird food crops over winter, filling the 'hungry gap' for our farmland birds such as linnetts, which thrive on our reserves in a good year.

While the weather is out of our control, we have been doing plenty

of work to improve our arable fields for birds and insects. Several hundred metres of new berry-rich hedges have been planted in recent years and we've been busy installing bee and beetle banks at Dropping Well Farm. The banks are not technically complex, made of a denser core covered by at least 30cm of nutrient-poor sand or subsoil to allow mining bees to make their burrows while reducing vegetation growth to keep it warm, the way the bees like it. They're south or southwest-facing and crescent-shaped to get the most variety of soil gradients and sunlight. The banks at Dropping Well Farm are large as we have plenty of space but even a small bank in your garden would be great for bees.

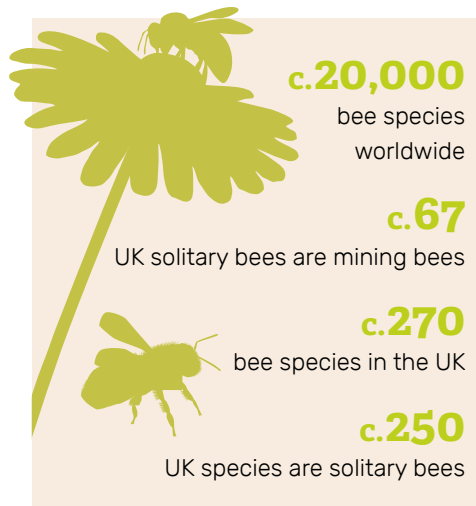
Helping others

As well as trying new techniques to improve our reserves, we also get involved where we can with research to investigate the changes we see in our countryside and species. This year we have again had cuckoos satellite-tagged on two of our reserves as part of an ongoing study by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to monitor impacts on their migration. You can follow Severn and Hafren's journey on the BTO's website www.bto.org/cuckoos. We've also taken part in a survey of Worcestershire woodlands to look for signs of the oak processionary moth, an introduced species that can cause serious damage to oak trees and can cause health issues in humans. Thankfully, so far we have seen no sign of this troublesome species.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the appeal land next to Hanley Dingle nature reserve and for your support across all our other reserves.



Rob Allen, WWT Reserves Team Leader. My love of nature began abroad, hearing about the threats to the incredible wildlife I saw.

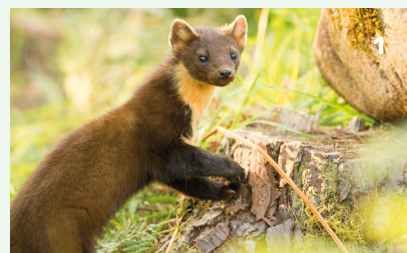


Did you know?

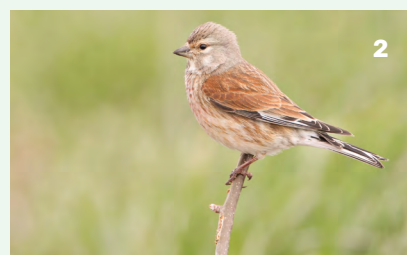
Brimstone butterflies are able to overwinter in sub-zero temperatures in the UK because they have naturally occurring anti-freeze in their blood.



HIGH FIVE HIGHLIGHTS



Mark Hamblin/2020VISION



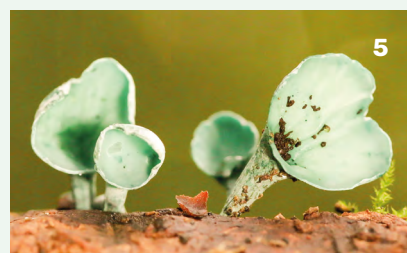
Karen Summers



John Caswell

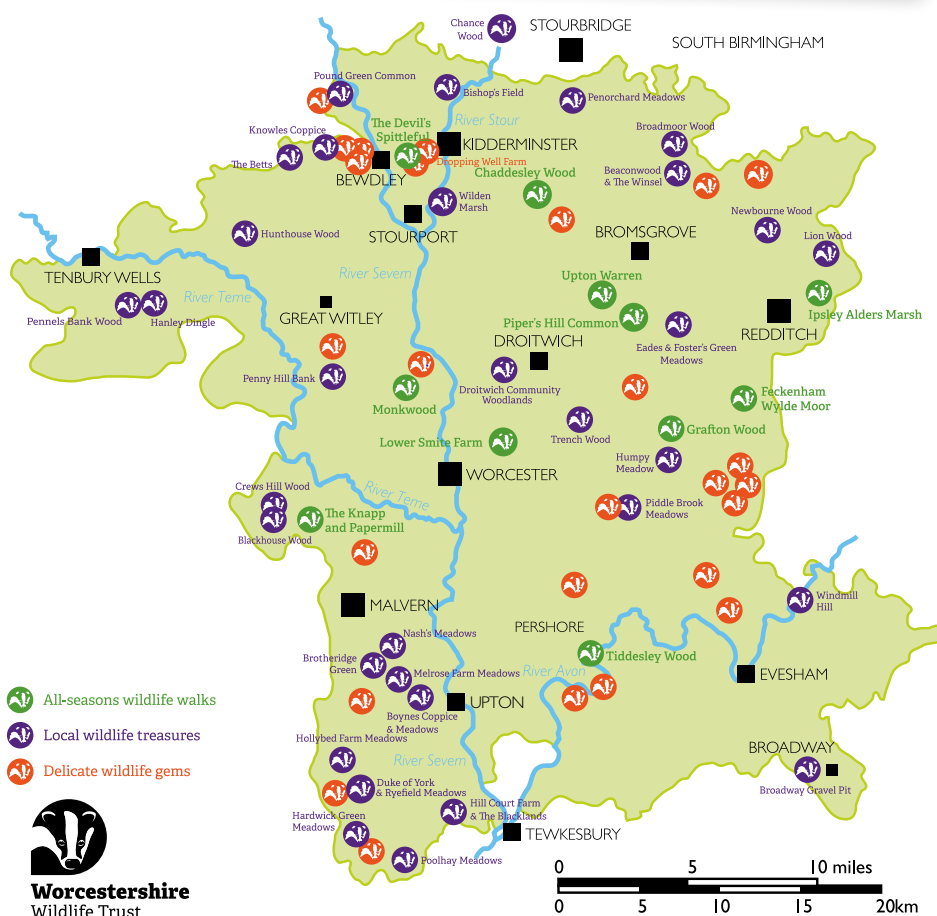


Alan Price



Julia Saunders

1. Pine marten, maybe in a wood near you.
2. Linnet, in seed-rich fields.
3. Nuthatch, possibly on your bird feeder.
4. Scaly male fern, in shady hedges and stream banks.
5. Green elf cup, on decomposing wood.



- All-seasons wildlife walks
- Local wildlife treasures
- Delicate wildlife gems



Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust



Keep up to date with our projects
www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/blog

Worcestershire's wild winter camouflage

The arrival of winter presents many challenges for our wildlife. As temperatures drop and days grow shorter, the leaves fall and there is less cover to hide in; being able to blend in with the background can be a life-saving strategy. Some creatures conceal themselves in nooks and crannies and slow down or sleep through this dark season but others are able to disappear by hiding in plain sight. It's a challenge to see them but with luck and by honing our detective skills we have a good chance of seeing them all this winter, in woods, marshes, gardens and even our homes.



Brett Westwood, WWT member. My love of nature began when I was five, discovering finger-sized poplar hawk-moth caterpillars in a garden willow.

Wendy Carter



Vaughn Matthews

Green shieldbug *Palomena prasina*

On warm winter days, look closely in the garden and you may see a green shieldbug basking in the weak sunshine and wonder how it got its name. In winter they turn brown – camouflage against the foliage in which they hide. They turn green again when spring's flush of foliage offers shelter. They feed on unripened fruits, such as hawthorn berries and rosehips, during summer and autumn.



Mark Hamblin/2020VISION

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

A soft snap of wings and a rusty shape weaving off between the tree trunks is usually all we see of this superbly-camouflaged bird. Up to a million woodcocks winter in the UK, travelling from as far away as Finland and Siberia and swelling our breeding population. With eyes set high on their heads for all-round vision, they spend their day resting in leaf litter, flying out to feed in nearby fields at dusk.



Chris Dover

Jack snipe *Lymnocyrtus minimus*

A supreme skulker, striped like the dead grasses in which it hides, this wader is always a special find in wet fields or damp, rushy spots. 'Jack' is an old word for lesser and this winter visitor is smaller than the common snipe with a shorter bill. Unlike its cousin, a jack snipe waits until you are about to step on it, then flushes with a straight flight, landing not far off and disappearing from view.



Eleanor Reast

Western conifer seed bug
Leptoglossus occidentalis

This large and unmistakable bug, with leaf-like flanges on its hind legs, is native to North America and was first seen in the UK in 2007. It feeds on developing flowers and young cones of conifers and sits, camouflaged, among the mature cones and foliage in gardens, parks and churchyards. It is active late into the year, sometimes into January, and will come to lighted windows on warmer evenings.



Wendy Carter

Angle shades caterpillar
Phlogophora meticulosa

It can be a surprise to find a large, bright green caterpillar munching in the garden in winter but it's also worth celebrating. This is the larva of the beautiful angles shades moth, which mimics a withered leaf and appears from spring to autumn. The caterpillars, which can also be brown, have a pale line along their sides and feed at night on milder evenings. They pupate in the soil.



Wendy Carter



David Meredith

Peacock *Aglais io*

In winter tree hollows, dry cellars, sheds and outhouses, this gaudily patterned butterfly with its art-deco eyespots disappears from view. With wings shut, it transforms into a fragment of bark or blackened leaf, slowing down its metabolism and entering diapause until spring. If disturbed, though, it rubs together its wings to make a hissing sound to scare off hungry birds or mice.



Margaret Holland

Tawny owl *Strix aluco*

Hunched by day against a tree trunk or in the depths of an evergreen, this surprisingly large bird with plumage the colour of dead leaves is easy to miss. A good clue to its presence is a loud racket from blackbirds, tits and finches, which mob it persistently to force it to move on, sometimes with a complaining wail. At night, unmolested, it hunts silently through our woods and gardens.



Oliver Wadsworth

Beautiful plume moth
Amblyptilia acanthadactyla

A scrap of dead leaf on the living room wall may surprise you by taking flight. The beautiful plume moth, a small but exquisitely-patterned insect, spends winter in sheltered spots including our houses. Its caterpillars feed on a wide range of wild plants and it is a harmless winter guest that will soon depart when we open the windows in spring.



Winter moth *Operophtera brumata*

Fluttering in car headlamps on midwinter nights, this insect seems too frail to survive winter. The flutterers we see are males, following a scent trail of pheromones exuded by the females who have very short wings and cannot fly. Look for both sexes on tree trunks after dark; a female may be caught in a spider web and may lure the delicate males to their doom with her last siren scent call.



Wilding our schools

On my lunchtime walk around Lower Smite Farm today I passed our school learning areas, quiet and still in the summer holiday sun. The wildlife garden, orchard, ponds and woodland are beautiful habitats for children to explore during their school visits to us, providing endless wonder and amazement.

We are proud to be celebrating 20 years of engaging young people through school trips to our farm. As I walked through our school woodland, the trees first planted as small saplings around the same time our education centre opened have grown and flourished, much like our school engagement work.

From small beginnings, word spread and numbers grew. By 2010, 173 schools visited in one academic year, an astonishing figure for a small team to achieve. Taking an average of 40 pupils per school visit between 2004 and 2012, an estimated 50,000 children took part in activities that introduced them to wildlife in their local area and how to help look after it.

Since then, visits at the farm have

continued to go from strength to strength and the enjoyment and delight of the children is captured in the thank you letters and poems we receive. One poem ends with 'Here I am having the time of my life!'. Teachers value bringing children on a trip that links to their classroom work whilst bringing alive the topic and giving them the opportunity to explore nature.

A natural learning journey

Despite these successes, the urgency of the biodiversity and climate crisis has become ever more pronounced. As has our deepening disconnection from the natural world. Research by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust showed that whilst one-off visits generate an interest in nature, the interest declines to pre-visit levels after just six to 12 months. Research by the University of Derby confirmed that repeat contact with nature is needed to generate a deep connection with the outdoors.

We challenged ourselves to consider how we could encourage schools to achieve more regular contact with nature to generate a long-term impact of one in four schools taking action for wildlife by 2030. We established four steps in encouraging Worcestershire's primary schools to join a natural learning journey with us:

- **Working together:** work with schools and local partners to deliver meaningful, co-designed products and services to encourage nature connection and action for wildlife.
- **Connect:** take part in activities to encourage nature connection among staff and pupils.
- **Grow:** facilitate schools to take action for wildlife, small or large.
- **Show:** connect schools together to show how learning in, for and about nature works in different schools and to learn from each other.



'A very big "thank you" for a fantastic day. All of us thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and the children haven't stopped talking about all that they did.'

Whittington Primary

Thank you!

Thanks to previous education officers who worked tirelessly across Trust nature reserves in the 1990s and then at Lower Smite Farm when the doors to the education centre opened in 2004. The success of our current work with schools could not have happened without the volunteers who give their time for free to help inspire children about the natural world and our sessional tutors who lead our school visits.

Our own learning journey

We needed to find out more about how we could support schools to learn in, about and for nature. In January we commissioned Lestari, an education and environmental social sciences consultancy, to find out what was already happening across the county and to discuss with senior leadership and teaching staff how to tackle the challenges and barriers schools face in going outdoors. A hopeful picture came back – all schools were trying to do something. Help and support were needed, however, to build confidence in the outdoors, coaching to take learning outside and support to senior leaders to integrate the outdoors into school life.

In August our trustees approved an ambitious and exciting three-year school engagement project. A new Wilder Schools Outreach Officer will implement Lestari's recommendations, working with up to 25 schools and potentially benefiting nearly 17,000 pupils. An

additional Wilder Schools Officer will provide long-term support to the delivery of school trips at Smite. This will help to free up some of my time to focus on evaluation and monitoring to ensure we are reaching our ambition of one in four schools taking action for wildlife.

The land knows best

This is an exciting opportunity to encourage regular play and learning for school pupils in the outdoors. The author Jay Griffiths notes, when researching childhood in different parts of the world, 'Indigenous Australians told me not only how children need the land, but also how the land needs children, to hear their voices and their laughter in order to know that it is not abandoned'. I love this idea of the land filling with joy as children explore and wonder at nature around them and maybe the land really does know best.



Discover our school programmes or book a free assembly:

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/schools



Marissa Ryland, WWT Engagement Officer, Education. My love of nature began with me making mud pies in the back garden.

Photo competition

Be part of our
2026 calendar!

If you love watching wildlife or being out in nature with a camera in your hand, this is the competition for you. We'd love to see your photos of the wonder of Worcestershire's wildlife and wild places.

Perhaps your favourite wild spot is your own garden or a hidden corner of your local town. Maybe it's one of our nature reserves or a peaceful spot you walk to. Wherever you see wildlife, keep a camera close to hand to capture the action.

Twelve lucky photographers will win an A4 space in our 2026 calendar and a copy of the calendar. Runner's-up images also feature and, of course, all entries help us to promote Worcestershire's fantastic wildlife.

We're all involved in judging and we're delighted to be joined by Pete Walkden www.petewalkden.co.uk and Jason Curtis 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 off-piste.
- 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

- Learn about your subject to know when and how to safely take photos for both you and them.
- Try to capture the 'moment'.
- Think about light, background and potential distractions in your photo.
- Don't let the weather put you off – it might 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 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: Monday 7th April 2025



Making new connections

On a cold winter's evening in a quiet corner of Worcestershire, a steady stream of figures file into a village hall, faces hidden under woolly hats and scarves, stamping frost from boots and gravitating to the warmth inside.

Tonight, they've come to meet with other like-minded lovers of wildlife and hear an expert talk passionately about a local nature reserve or the plight of a species or a new project that needs support. Inside the hall it's warm, the tea is flowing and the biscuit tin is full, groups gather and chat while they wait for the speaker to start and newcomers are welcomed like old friends. In a world where real-life connection is becoming a lost art, this feels special.

This scene is repeated in towns and villages across the county as our local groups host enthusiastic speakers talking about topics close to our hearts.

These volunteer-led groups have been the lifeblood of the Trust for decades, helping to build community and spread our message. As well as talks, they also organise local walks (often guided) and trips to nature reserves and other sites of interest. Everyone is welcome and visiting different groups outside your own area is also encouraged, providing a great opportunity to get to know your beautiful county in a different way.

The local groups also serve a very important social connection and the regular meet-ups allow for friendships to form around a shared common interest. As volunteer-led committees, the groups are always on the lookout for keen supporters who can lend their skills in administration, book-keeping, marketing or general support – the best way to get involved is to attend a local group event and get to

know the committee and their needs.

For many Worcestershire residents, local groups are an important point of contact with our work. This is vital in bringing in more support to the Trust; through volunteering, donations, memberships and engagement. Without our local groups, we'd be missing a very human element, one that reminds us of a shared vision with our communities in every corner of the county. Why not head along to your local group's next meeting and find out what it's all about? You'll be most welcome.



Elise Hill, WWT Senior Membership Officer. My love of nature began sitting atop haybales eating lunch and watching wildlife in action.



Illustrated talks – where and when?

Bromsgrove & NE Worcestershire: Amphlett Hall, Bromsgrove. Second Monday of the month.

Malvern: Lyttleton Rooms, Great Malvern. First Thursday of the month.

Redditch: Winyates Green Community Centre. Second Wednesday of the month.

Southeast Worcestershire: The Friends Meeting House, Evesham. Second Wednesday of the month.

Stourbridge & Hagley: St Saviours Church, Hagley. Last Friday of the month.

Wyre Forest: Holy Innocents Community Hall, Foley Park. First Thursday of the month.

Visit www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on

‘What was the wildlife moment that made you care about what happens to our wildlife today and in the future?’





Terry Whitaker/2020VISION

We are so lucky. Nature is surprising and astonishing. It touches our lives in many ways and we don't always notice the amazing things happening around us.

So much variety. So much to know. And, yet, even more not yet known or understood. Endless possibilities to amaze, from the small and everyday berry to the endless colour fractions of a bird's feather or a dragonfly wing. Change happens every day and every hour as light and weather alters; a tantalising glimpse, sound, smell or touch unique and special to that moment.

My love of wildlife built up over many years as a child in Bristol. I

loved to run in the woods at Blaise Castle, look at flowers in the hedgerow bottoms or peer into the rockpools at Clevedon. That feeling of wonder and awe has stayed with me throughout my work and personal life, bringing new joys every day.

I'm writing in September and have just nipped out to the Lower Smite Farm garden. I spotted a shieldbug on the raspberries and I watched bees on the lavender; this is enough to make me smile on a difficult day.

Encourage nature thoughts and feelings in your life, take a deep breath and look around. Share your love of nature with a friend, a colleague or someone in your family.

Take a moment to think about how you can activate an interest in wildlife in someone you know. Perhaps you can help them build stepping stones to add nature into their life just like you've done over the years.

We asked five nature lovers to tell us more about what sparked their love of wildlife and what nature means to them.



Can you help someone to find their love of nature?



Helen Woodman,

WWT Head of Conservation. My love of nature began because I loved being active outside in all weathers.



Laura Maloney



Joe Gillard



“ I joined the army as a medic in 1996. After having a total hip replacement in 2008, whilst still serving, I started to enjoy nature again and taking the odd photo. We lived opposite a fishing lake in Aldershot and, wow, it was amazing – I loved my walking rehab around the lake and soon got back to a good level of fitness.

In 2013 just after having my daughter Charlotte, I was medically discharged and this is when I started to really get back to nature. I helped a bat group release some pipistrelles that had got caught in the medical centre I was working in – this was amazing experience and sparked more joy.

It wasn't long before my mum, Charlotte, nephews and I were doing wild sleepouts and learning more about where we live in Worcester. It's amazing what we have right here on our doorstep. Worcestershire is a diverse and beautiful place; we have so much to enjoy – nature is the best medicine if you are feeling deflated, angry with the world or just need some space. Nature has a healing and grounding ability on us – we often forget that we are also nature and that flora and fauna are as much part of us as anything. ”

Laura Maloney
Overall winner
2024 Trust photo competition

“ Growing up, we were always outside as my parents owned an ex-working canal barge, definitely no mod cons. I was lucky to go to a school where it was normal to camp outside all summer, spending the weekends kayaking and walking on Dartmoor.

We joined Wyre Wildlife Watch Group with our own children, which I later helped run. I really enjoyed learning more about local wildlife alongside my children. I had the chance to change careers so trained as a forest school leader and started volunteering on local nature reserves; I now teach outdoors with several local wildlife organisations.

Teaching outdoors has helped deepen my own connection to nature, as I've needed to think more about what it is that makes being outside fun and then incorporate it into my sessions. I'm lucky to have the time to volunteer several times a week and so have lots of opportunities for magical chance encounters with local wildlife, which rekindles my enthusiasm on those days when volunteering is hot, scratchy and exhausting.

If you want to get closer to nature, do remember that we have a responsibility to leave the landscape as we find it. No one ever knows everything so keep asking why, what, how; knowledge deepens your connection. We can know a little about a lot and that's just fine. ”

Mary Bendall
Wildlife Trust gardening
& education volunteer

“ I have so many wonderful memories; playing in my grandmother's garden as a small child, watching the tigers roaming at Longleat, walking my dogs whilst wildlife spotting with my mum and saving the frogs in the woodland area at school. Wildlife makes me feel calm and happy because I love being outside and our world is a beautiful place!

My Grandad Mike has influenced my connection with nature. I love the wildlife magazines he sends me and they have helped me to understand that wildlife needs our help – whether it's the tiny frogs at school who can't find the pond or red pandas in China and India. They can't fight for themselves so I want to fight for them and their habitats. Grandad also takes the most wonderful pictures of wildlife – they make me want to see them for real.

Everyone can connect with nature. Even if you are just having a walk take note of the wildlife that is all around you. It's everywhere and is amazing. We enjoy walking our dogs and doing a wildlife treasure hunt. It's easy, free and makes me notice even the smallest of minibeasts! ”

Elizabeth Lawrance
Wildlife Watch member
and junior fundraiser



“ I grew up in West Ham, London, at the time a suburban area with not much in the way of green space. There was, however, an area known as the Wanstead Flats, former common land and subsequently local authority owned. This space, with its pond and three ‘plantations’ of trees, was a haven for me, a nervous child, and I would find walking across the Flats calming.

We lived in a small house across from the Flats on Chestnut Avenue, so named for its row of horse chestnuts and their plentiful supply of conkers, which we enjoyed collecting for our conker tournaments. Our terraced house was small but benefitted from a strip of garden that I took to tending as a teenager, without much knowledge of gardening but enjoying it nonetheless. We also had access to a roof-space where we could enjoy the rooftops of London, tuning in to Radio Luxembourg.

These simple moments outside were formative for a lifetime appreciation of nature and they prompted a deeper concern for protecting it. Wherever you live, whether urban or rural, it's important that you find your connection with nature as soon as possible. Through time spent outdoors, joining groups or volunteering, find some way to reinforce that intrinsic love of nature and desire to protect it for future generations.”

Michael Jeeves

Wildlife Trust reception volunteer



“ When I was asked to write this piece about what drew me to, inspired and fascinated me about wildlife I went and sat outside on my patio and gave it some thought. In front of me, not 10 feet away, was one of my bird feeders and as I sat there, contemplating, I watched four goldfinches and a greenfinch feeding away on sunflower heart seeds, content and oblivious. Then suddenly, and in the blink of an eye, the whole scene changed. A flash of brown swept past me at lightning speed, a few small feathers floated in the air and there, perched on the feeder, with the hapless greenfinch in one of its talons was a female sparrowhawk. She stared at me for a second, menacingly, with those brilliant yellow eyes, piercing, indignant,

and then flew off with her prey.

And there in those few moments was everything I love about wildlife and nature; its beauty, its menace, its ability to surprise, its savagery, its magnificence, its capability to astonish. I was once again reminded of those evocative words from one of my favourite naturalists Denys Watkins Pitchford (or ‘BB’ as he was better known):

The wonder of the world,
the beauty and the power,
the shapes of things,
their colours, lights and shades;
these I saw.

Look ye also while life lasts.”

Simon Warr

Wildlife Trust recruiter

Wild notebook

Mustn't
forget

Five things to photograph:

- Woodlice living under garden tubs.
- A hedge with berries for winter birds.
- Ice patterns on a frosted window.
- Wych elm flowers on bare twigs.
- The first bumblebee of the year.

Five things to do:

- Study a geology map and identify local rocks on a winter walk.
- Find a wild plant in flower on Christmas day.
- Start a nature diary in January.
- Visit a churchyard or parkland full of flowering snowdrops.
- Listen for chattering fieldfares in fields and hedges.

All photographs by Rosemary Winnall



STAR SPECIES



Winter aconite *Eranthis hyemalis*

These bright yellow flowers, harbingers of spring, provide welcome colour to our gardens at the end of winter. They grow wild in calcareous woodlands in France, Italy and the Balkans and have naturalised in the rest of Europe. In Worcestershire we can find them occasionally in golden carpets in a few woods, hedgerows and some churchyards. They are in the buttercup family and, like other related species, are poisonous to humans. Their exquisite fruits open into a circle of small upright cups holding seeds that are dispersed during rain.

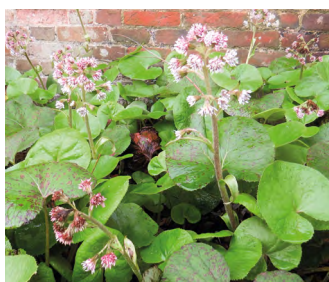
Old harvest mouse nest

A winter walk along margins of fields where wheat and oats have been grown is a good place to search for the abandoned breeding nests of one of our smallest mammals. The nest, tightly woven with split grass leaves, is often attached to a strong plant amongst tall grasses.



House sparrow *Passer domesticus*

These endearing birds, which have learned to share our habitations, can be spotted socialising and singing in winter sunshine and visiting our garden feeders. The size of the male's black bib indicates its status. But these sparrows are now red-listed and numbers have declined by over 70% in recent years.



Winter heliotrope *Petasites fragrans*

Often found flowering along roads and hedges in mid-winter, this garden escape can be found throughout the year because of its evergreen hairy round leaves. The vanilla-scented flowers are all female in the UK so plants can only spread vegetatively. During the day the flowers turn to track the winter sun.



Yellow may dun *Heptagenia sulphurea*

Turning stones over along the edge of river riffles may reveal this mayfly nymph with distinctive stripey legs, alternate light and dark bars on its three tail filaments and eyes on the top of its head. Its flattened body enables it to cling to the stones to prevent it being washed away.

Striped millipede *Ommatoiulus sabulosus*

This plump millipede, one of our largest British species, is easy to identify due to the two long ginger stripes along its back. Active in the daytime it might be seen climbing on trees and walls to graze on algae, or on the ground to feed on dead plant matter.



Cherry gall

These galls, smooth on English oak trees and warty on sessile oaks, are formed by the tree in response to an egg laid by the gall wasp *Cynips quercusfolii*. They fall with the leaves, the adult wasps (all females) emerge in late winter, and the sexual generation develop in galls on oak buds.



Let us know what you spot – take a photo and upload to

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings



Rosemary Winnall, WWT member. My love of nature began when my parents shared their passion for wildlife.

Seasonal pickings

Top tip

If you are feeding birds during winter, provide high fat (no salt). Most importantly, remember to regularly wash the table and feeders to prevent infections from spreading. You can find good advice on how to do this on our website www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/actions

It was two winter ducks in a totally unexpected location that helped to reawaken my interest in birdwatching.

The Chesterfield Canal ran alongside my place of work in the centre of Retford, Nottinghamshire, and on one occasion I was staggered when a female greater scaup rested there for a couple of days. On another day, an exhausted female eider duck was found in our yard. I'm sure I'm not the only person who has found that life gets in the way of actively pursuing a hobby but my experience is that when it comes to wildlife, the passion never permanently leaves you.

Winter, with its short days and inclement weather, is not a season you would describe as being a time of plenty, especially when compared to the species-rich days of spring and summer. But if you wrap up warm and head out to any stretch of open water,

whether on our nature reserves or in your local area, you'll find that winter is a great time for getting to grips with wildfowl.

Our resident and graceful mute swans are joined by their northern cousins, whoopers and Bewick's. If you happen to spot a group of swans grazing in a field during the winter, you may be lucky to spot one of these winter visitors.

Ducks, though, are much easier to find. During winter our breeding populations of mallards, tufted ducks, teal, gadwall and shovelers are boosted by those escaping harsher winters elsewhere. For example, 120,000 mallards increase to 675,000 across the UK and 5,000 teal to 435,000!

Identifying ducks is made easier in winter because the drakes (males) are resplendent in full breeding plumage. From the end of the year, they indulge in their display

behaviour as they court a mate. The real attraction of watching winter wildfowl, though, is seeing those ducks that can't really be seen at other times of the year: wigeon, goldeneye, pintail or even a greater scaup.

There is evidence that as winters become progressively milder due to the changing climate, wildfowl won't need to fly so far to escape the cold weather that grips their northern breeding grounds, a phenomenon known as 'short stopping'. This may not negatively affect their populations but will affect what birds we're able to watch in Worcestershire.



Ion Riley, WWT
Community Warden Officer. My love of nature began whilst wandering down country lanes with friends as a child.



Wigeon (male)

Silent flight

The owl flew through the night-time wood on silent wings of soft-fringed feathers. Circling with care and precision in vacant spaces round trees and dropping down to fly through coppice gaps . . . searching.

✿ She only weighs 470g but looks bigger as her body is covered with a deep layer of soft feathers that move with the air around her making no sound. They insulate her small body from the cold night air.

✿ She is alert, her dark eyes wide, the stiff feathers of her facial disc erect, reflecting the slightest sound into her asymmetrically placed ears so she can accurately pinpoint sounds amongst the leaf litter.

✿ She flies over a well-known spot, moves her head from side to side, focuses her ears, raises her talons to point directly at the rustling leaves and drops fast and silent to the very spot and grabs a wood mouse. She rises, flying to an old oak that contains her nest in a big hollow branch. She presents the mouse-gift to her voracious chicks then flies off to hunt again.

✿ The owl knows the wood like the back of her soft feathered wings. She found it when she was young and the male therein had made his territory in a vacant space and he allowed her in. They made it home and fought off other owls; they'll stay until death or are driven off by a younger, stronger invading owl.

✿ Tawny owls are sedentary birds and a good life for them depends on living in one wood, or even a patch of city parkland, and learning every detail so they can silently hunt on the wing in the dark.

✿ Later in winter, with calls, hoots and chases they'll drive off their grown brood to find their own territories and mates. The quivering hooting warns off would-be invading land-grabbing owls.

Words: **Harry Green**

Photo: **Elliot Neep**





Fruit trees are fantastic

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

Fruit trees are fantastic for wildlife and a great way of making space for nature in gardens. Wild fruit trees

offer homes for numerous insects at all stages of their lives, nesting birds and small mammals such as bats. Vitally they also provide year-round food: blossom is nectar for wild bees emerging from hibernation, leaves and the fruit feed moth caterpillars.

Fruit trees in blossom are beautiful but they have a broader benefit for the natural environment and for

people too. They improve soil quality, filter the air and slow water run-off, which reduces flooding, as well as providing shade in hot weather and lessening noise pollution. I plant native hedgerows to provide windbreaks and shelter for wildlife such as hedgehogs and house sparrows.

Choosing a tree

You do not need a big garden to grow fruit trees and some smaller varieties will grow happily in pots. When I am choosing the right tree for the right place I always consider:

- **Height:** The mature size should be appropriate for the available space. Especially important if there are buildings, telephone cables or powerlines nearby.
- **Shape:** The average dimensions of the tree's canopy spread will affect shading and space so slender trees such as rowan are ideal for smaller gardens.
- **Soil:** Check the label when buying a tree for its hardiness to drought and preference of soil type to match with your garden e.g. clay, chalky, sandy or loam soils.

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



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



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



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



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



Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) berries are loved by blackbirds and other thrushes whilst the clusters of creamy flowers and purple-black berries are used for cordials, champagne and wine.



Wild plum (*Prunus insititia*) or bullace grows in hedgerows. Fruiting later than damsons, they're an important food for wildlife and, whilst smaller and less sweet than domestic plums, they can be stewed to make preserves.



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



Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*) is often propagated by birds eating the fruits and dispersing the seeds. For us, the fruit is suitable for juries, chutneys, soups, vinegar, cordials and wine.



Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) is a valuable early source of nectar for pollinators and, like many wild fruits, sloe berries have medicinal uses as well as being used to flavour gin.



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

Finding your feet



I am a person who cannot stay still for very long. Hiking and going on adventures are part of my DNA. Whether it's discovering new corners of the world or right here at home in the UK, getting outdoors is so good for our physical and mental health. Plus, there is so much to see and learn about; we share the planet with so many amazing flora and fauna.

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

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

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

We needed to challenge stereotypes

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

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

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

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



www.wildlifetrusts.org/commitment-to-ed

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Rhiane Fatinukun MBE



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

@rhianesworld

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE

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

www.wildlifetrusts.org/visit/choose-your-adventure

Your letters

We'd love to hear from you!
Please send your letters to **editor@worcestershiREWildlifeTrust.org**

Yellow-necked mouse



Paul Reynolds

Unexpected visitor

At first I thought this was one of our resident wood mice. However, after some investigation, I now think that it is a yellow-necked mouse.

Paul Reynolds

Ed. We agree – the yellow markings on the neck are clear in your photo.

Ringlet butterfly



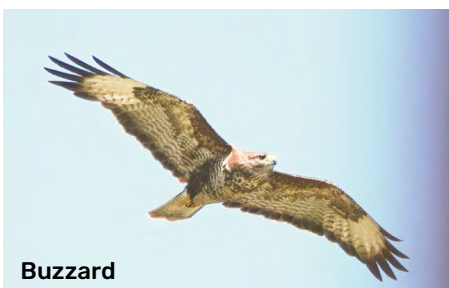
Peter Hawcroft

Lovely visit

I had a lovely visit to your Penorchard Meadows nature reserve and saw this fresh ringlet butterfly.

Peter Hawcroft

Buzzard



Pat Pitt

Wren's nest



Wren nest

We have a wren nesting outside our front door. Hopefully we won't disturb it too much. We heard lots of little cheeps last night!

Dan Smith

Elephant hawk-moth with spider



Barbara Evans

Moth vs spider

I couldn't quite believe this. We assume that the elephant hawk-moth must have crash-landed and the spider seized the opportunity. The spider won.

Barbara Evans

Buzzard delight

My husband Andy saw this from our garden as it circled overhead so he dashed inside to grab the camera. We often see buzzards from our garden and now increasingly we see red kites too.

Pat Pitt

My wildlife of foxes

From the hours of dusk to dawn, listening to the birds singing, in chorus outside my bedroom window, is better to the alarm clock ringing.

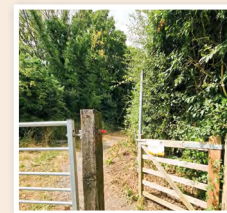
I sit up in bed as dawn wakes up, to the world outside and the sun rises, with an air of excitement as creatures awake, scurrying around with the life of surprises.

With memories of magical sightings When I woke up to young foxes at play chasing each other with a game of tag, yapping 'You can't catch me!' I heard them say.

This inspires poetry and sketching of the countryside, from these great moments of wildlife by my side.

Tim Stavert

Social feeds



Another day, another walk. I am over halfway through visiting all of the **@worcswt** sites

and am discovering so many hidden gems.

@earthmomma82



Lesser stag beetle on the east track Moors **#uptonwarren** the main highlight this afternoon

@birdergwc.bsky.social

Stephy Gregg

Gert Corfield

KEEP IN TOUCH

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Leave a legacy for nature



Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust looks after vital places for nature across the county. From woodlands and wetlands to grasslands and heathlands, we work hard to protect these wonderful places for wildlife.

The Trust would not have been able to take on these incredibly special places without help from our supporters. Please consider leaving a legacy for nature in your Will to help support our vital work.



To find out more, please visit www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/legacy or contact us on enquiries@worcestershirowildlifetrust.org or 01905 754919 for a confidential discussion.