

Worcestershire **WILDLIFE**



Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust





Welcome

Welcome to my first contribution as the Trust's new Chief Executive. I've worked at the Trust since 2017 as our Head of Resources and became the Trust's new Chief Executive in January this year.

I've lived in Worcestershire most of my life and I am honoured to have been asked to lead the Trust. It is hard not to be struck by how many people dedicate so much time and effort to nature conservation in our county. Our work is as important and as relevant as it has ever been. It is only together with you, our members, our amazing volunteers, our dedicated staff team and key funders and partners that we can make progress towards slowing and ultimately reversing the decline of nature in our wonderful county.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the Trust's Protecting Worcestershire's Hidden Rainforest fundraising appeal to purchase land adjacent to our Hanley Dingle nature reserve to make this amazing place bigger, better and more connected.

At the end of April, the Trust's Head of Conservation, Helen Woodman, is retiring after over 30 years with us. We will miss Helen and pay tribute to her huge impact on the work of the Trust.

To end my first column, I also want to pay tribute to my predecessor Colin Raven whose large shoes, in every sense, I am stepping into. Colin has left the Trust on firm footings and in a strong position to deliver for nature in the years ahead.

Mike Perry
Chief Executive Officer

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Wendy Carter

20



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.

President: Harry Green
Chair: Christianne Tipping
Vice Chair: Tom Meikle
Treasurer: John Blakiston
Secretary: Bob Gillmor
Chief Executive Officer: Mike Perry
Head of Conservation: Helen Woodman
Head of Resources: Ally Wilson
Head of Finance and Operations: Tom Jenkins
Discover the rest of the team on our website.

Your magazine team: Wendy Carter, Harry Green, Shauna McLaren, Mike Perry, Colin Raven, Brett Westwood, Rosemary Winnall, Helen Woodman.

Cover photo: Wendy Carter



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Brett Westwood



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Six ways to get involved with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Events Discover Worcestershire's wildlife while meeting like-minded people [worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on](https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on)

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](https://www.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](https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/local-groups)

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

Shop Check our online shop for cards, calendars and gifts – all proceeds help our work. [worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/shop](https://www.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](https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/legacy)

Our wild connections

Thanks to you
We're helping
to connect
habitats across
Worcestershire

On mild spring evenings, in hedgerows and woods, gardens and marshes, an annual ritual is under way: common toads are marching to their breeding ponds.

These warty wanderers have long captured our imaginations. In folklore they're witches' companions, hiding a jewel in their heads. For the poet Norman McCaig, the toad was a purse 'full of satisfaction' squatting on the floor of his house; for Philip Larkin, it symbolised his onerous workload. Shakespeare thought they were 'ugly and venomous'.

The amphibians once played a significant role in our culture but now, in a hectic, fragmented world, they are declining and have a new role as environmental barometers. What toads need is a healthy, undisturbed landscape where the soil is rich in worms and insects, where they can find shelter throughout their lives and through which they can travel safely to their breeding ponds. It might not seem much to ask but toad-friendly places like these are increasingly in short supply.

Road building and housing developments, simplification of the countryside by over-tidying, wetland drainage and soil and water pollution are just some of the reasons why so many species are disappearing. Wildlife requires links between areas of high-quality habitat. The good news is that there is a lot we can do to help, as a society and individually. It's all about inter-connectedness: the key to success for all our wildlife, including the common toad.





Betsy Digger



Linda Pitkin/2020VISION



Pete Walkden

If we think about the stages of a toad's life, it has different demands of its environment at different times: clean water for spawning and tadpole development in spring, plenty of food, shelter from cold and heat in summer and a winter hibernation hideaway. Paradise for these amphibians would include a mix of pools and wetlands, hedgerows, grasslands, shrubberies and woodlands with healthy soils and, most important of all, corridors of undisturbed habitat along which they can travel safely. This environment has a lot to offer other creatures. Think of bumblebees and their need for nectar and nest-sites in mossy places or hedgehogs that roam widely in search of food and a mate. The richer and more closely inter-linked habitats are, the better they will be for wildlife.

Most of us notice toads in early spring. On mild evenings in late February and March, the adults may

travel up to 1.5 km to reach their breeding ponds. They crawl singly or in couples, the males clinging amorously to their mates with newly-developed horny pads on their forelegs. But their determination to reach these ponds is often thwarted by roads and thousands die in Worcestershire each spring under the wheels of vehicles.

Nationally, these traffic casualties were noticed as long ago as 1938 but it was in the 1960s and 1970s that biologists began to monitor local declines. Nowadays, increasing numbers of vehicles and roads mean that common toads are no longer common over large swathes of Britain; populations have plummeted by over two thirds. Those individuals that dodge the traffic can be stymied by high kerbs that direct them towards drains in which they drown. I spent many days as a teenager rescuing hundreds of toads from drains on the new Hagley estate where we lived.

Toads surviving this cocktail of hazards may be isolated by urban development and risk in-breeding in their dwindling populations.

Toad patrols

This all sounds grim but we can do something. We can join our local toad patrol promoted by Froglife, the reptile and amphibian conservation charity. In Britain there are around 250 such patrols that help over 130,000 toads cross safely each spring and make an immediate and positive difference to the numbers reaching their spawning ponds. Wendy Carter, this magazine's editor, is a volunteer toad crossing manager for Froglife and on a damp February evening, you'll find her out with her fellow volunteers rescuing toads, which she says is chilly but very rewarding. 'It's brilliant to be able to do something that so obviously has



Nick Upton/2020VISION

an immediate impact. After several nights of moving toads, frogs and newts into a roadside pond, the sound of the individuals singing to attract a mate is quite the choir.'

On a larger scale, Froglife works with local authorities to encourage installation of underpasses beneath busy roads to successfully re-connect not only toads but newts, snakes and small mammals to other parts of their range. Dropped kerbs can help toads negotiate awkward crossings and 'ladders' sunk into drains can help them escape these potential death traps.

Joined-up toads

In a well-connected landscape, ponds and lakes play a vital role for species such as newts and dragonflies, frogs and toads. But many ponds are at risk from agricultural chemicals or run-off from roads. They may shade over, dry out or

become colonised by vegetation; about half a million ponds have been lost from the British landscape in the last hundred years. But toads can breed in larger water bodies than frogs because their tadpoles are distasteful to fish, so the creation and re-establishment of ponds and lakes on farmland may offer them some help.

The Trust's Natural Networks team advise communities and landowners on pond creation, for example at Bull Meadow in Fernhill Heath where there is now a suite of permanent ponds and temporary scrapes. Around 10% of garden ponds have breeding toads, which means that if there is a local population and the traffic nearby isn't too heavy, we can help our local toads and other wildlife by digging a good-sized pond where we live.

31% decline in reptiles/ amphibians.*

68% decline in toads since 1985.†

c.50% of Worcestershire ponds lost in the last 100 years.‡

Records submitted to our Wildlife Sightings project:

56% frogspawn reported in garden ponds.

19% of toadspawn reported in garden ponds.

* State of Nature 2023.
† Froglife toad patrol data.
‡ Worcestershire State of Nature 2024.



Daniel Smith, Aspect Design





Daniel Smith, Aspect Design

Four seasons in a toad's life

Spring Wakes up and migrates up to 1.5 km to breeding pond (hopefully via a safe, connected landscape with hedgerows, grassy tussocks, waterways and few roads). Eggs are laid. Tadpoles eat algae and other plant material, toadlets leave the pond to look for small insects and spiders.

Summer Hunts for food (earthworms, slugs, beetles, insects) and safe places to hunker down (base of tussocky grass, damp crevices, etc.).

Autumn Prepares for winter, builds up energy reserves and finds somewhere to snooze. Some toads migrate to wintering grounds. Some will bury themselves into mud, others will seek nooks and crannies under tree roots, plant pots, log-piles, etc.

Winter Brumates (amphibian version of hibernation).

From toadlet to adult

More perils await the toadlets, each no bigger than a bluebottle, when they leave their breeding pools in early summer. Toads spawn in my local canal in Stourbridge and live amongst tussocks and other nooks and crannies on an adjacent brownfield site. Historically, when they emerged from the water, the toadlets used to have a short hop across a narrow grassy towpath. This is now a wide, metalled cycle-path and the canal edges are neatly trimmed each year: the young toads' only safe exit is through a metal overflow channel. One summer, I found hundreds of them fried on the hot surface, a vivid warning of the effects of a combination of climate change combined with excessive tidying. Since then yet another connection has been severed: the old brownfield site is now a modern housing estate and I don't know if the thin margin of canal-side vegetation that remains will be enough to keep this population viable.

The fortunate toads that make it to adulthood need food and shelter at all times throughout their lives. We can provide this in our gardens and parks by making log-piles or brick shelters, allowing areas of long grass and vegetation to grow in places and by avoiding harmful chemicals so that the soil is rich in invertebrates. By caring for toads, we are also encouraging a much wider range of wildlife. Dragonflies and newts will colonise our ponds, maybe orange-tip butterflies will breed on the lady's smock that springs up in unmown grassy corners or even a hedgehog might move into a log-pile. And, of course, the same applies on a larger scale in the open countryside: connections really count.



Brett Westwood WWT member, naturalist and author who is passionate about wildlife on his local patch.

Froglife registered toad patrols (2024)

UK toad crossings:

134,532 toads helped.

17,385 dead on crossing.

247 patrols.



Froglife's largest crossing, at Henley-Marlow, saved **11,500** toads in 2024.



Find or report a toad crossing near you: www.froglife.org/what-we-do/toads-on-roads/

Report toads, frogs or their spawn www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings

Daniel Smith, Aspect Design

Humble bumbles

With a black body and red tail, queen red-tailed bumblebees are one of our most striking bees.

Words: **Wendy Carter**

Photograph: **Simon Pugsley**

Red-tailed queens emerge in spring; look for them feeding on dandelions, colt's-foot and other early-flowering plants.

Queens will find a suitable place to nest, perhaps in an old mouse hole, where they'll create a pot that they'll fill with nectar. They'll also create a mound of pollen onto which they'll lay their first few eggs.

The eggs hatch into larvae and begin to eat the pollen. The queen has a balancing act of keeping the larvae warm (by buzzing her wings) whilst continuing to feed on flowers and bring back nectar and pollen.

The larvae develop into female worker bees, heading out to search for nectar to bring back to the nest to feed more growing larvae (these are in wax cells each filled with pollen). The queen now stays in the nest and doesn't see sunlight again.

Eventually, queens begin to produce males and new queens so the next generation can begin.

Last year (2024) was a very bad year for bumblebees and other insects. A warm, early spring was followed by a cool and damp late spring and summer with heavy and prolonged rain; the delicate balancing act of queen bumblebees foraging for food whilst caring for the early larvae was destabilised.

Bumblebee Conservation's nationwide BeeWalk scheme counted good numbers of red-tailed bumblebees in March and April but then . . . nothing. In June, sightings were 17% of typical levels. Our Wildlife Sightings scheme showed a similar absence – just three sightings for the whole of 2024, an 88% decrease on the peak of sightings in 2021. Nationally, bumblebee numbers did increase by late summer but were still down, overall, on previous years.

If you see a red-tailed bumblebee this year, take a photo and let us know via www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings



Local news

Worcestershire's wetland wildlife

A fantastic opportunity has arisen to buy land on Longdon Marsh. Not far from our Hill Court Farm nature reserve, the small fields, ponds and hedgerows will allow us to provide another stepping stone for wildlife in this floodplain landscape.

Longdon and Eldersfield Marshes were once Worcestershire's largest and most important wetland. Bitterns and swallowtail butterflies were found there before the land was drained for agriculture in the Victorian period. In 1867 the naturalist Edwin Lee wrote,

'Even in summer a few days of continued rain inundates these flat meadows . . . in autumn the marsh is covered with geese and the ground,

white with feathers, presents a strangely barren aspect amidst the cultivated country that slowly advances on its lessening borders.'

Since 2001 we've been restoring 120 hectares of this habitat at Hill Court Farm. Today, the fields, scrapes, ponds, ditches and hedgerows see myriad wildlife. Irregular visitors even include marsh harriers and common cranes.

By buying more land, we hope to join the dots and help even more wildlife – from kingfishers and lapwings to common toads and beautiful demoiselles. The land up for sale includes tussocky grassland, open water ponds, pollarded willows, ditches and mature hedgerows. In

times of heavy rain, the land will also help to hold onto the water, slowing the flow and reducing the chance of flooding further downstream.

You can help us to kickstart our fundraising appeal by donating **via the Big Give's website between midday on 22nd to 29th April**. Every donation will be doubled. During the Big Give's Christmas Challenge, you helped us to raise a whopping £42,014.75 for Saving Worcestershire's Rainforests – **thank you**.

 Donate from 22nd April at <https://bit.ly/WorcsWetlandWildlifeBG>



Kingfisher – Rebecca Nash; curlew – Rob Evans; lapwing – Wendy Carter; toad – Wendy Carter; otter – Andy Warr; ragged robin – Zoe Stevens; beautiful demoiselle – Gay Edwards; 2020 VISION



Becky Bradshaw-King

Saving Worcestershire's Rainforests

Thank you so much to everyone who donated to our appeal to buy land next to our Hanley Dingle nature reserve in the Teme Valley. As we go to press we are closing in on our target of £470,000 and are just waiting to hear from one or two trusts and foundations. We hope to have more good news about this exciting project in our summer issue.

Events near you

There are plenty of walks, talks, day trips and activities taking place across the county. Coming up soon:

Friday 28 March – **Birds and How They See**. Talk with Stourbridge and Hagley Local Group.

Thursday 3 April – **Orchid conservation**. Talk with Malvern Local Group.

Wednesday 9 April – **Borneo – land below the wind**. Talk with Redditch Local Group.

Sunday 13 April – **In search of wood anemones**. Walk with Wyre Forest Local Group.

Monday 14 April – **Spotting wildlife near you**. Talk with Bromsgrove and NE Worcestershire Local Group.

Tuesday 15 April – **Midweek ramble along the Avon**. Walk with SE Worcestershire Local Group.

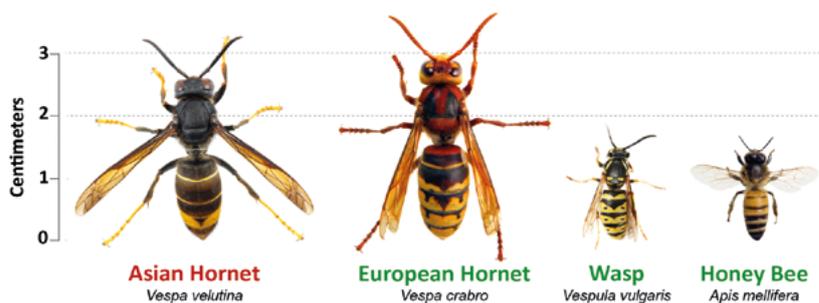
Wednesday 23 April – **Spring family nature day**, Lower Smite Farm.

Visit www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on for information about all our events.

Know your hornet

Almost all credible sightings of Asian hornet in 2024 were in Kent and Sussex. Whilst there were no reports in or near Worcestershire, we should remain vigilant and report sightings of this non-native species to the National Bee Unit. Our Wildlife Sightings team

would also love to hear about sightings of native hornet so take a look at www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/know-your-hornets to help you identify hornets and find out how and where to report your sightings.



Report through the Asian Hornet Watch app or www.bit.ly/asianhornetreport



Digital magazine

To read your magazine digitally, visit www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/magazineMar25 and let us know via the short form if you'd like to permanently switch to digital.

Raffle

A big thank you to the Elms Hotel, St Peter's Garden Centre, the Jinney Ring, the Buzz and the Hop Shed for providing prizes for this year's raffle. Last year the raffle raised over £6,600 for our work to help wildlife across Worcestershire.

Elections to Trust Council

Elections to the Trust's governing body will take place at the AGM on Saturday 11th October 2025. Nominations must be made on the nomination form, obtainable from Lower Smite Farm, by 9th June 2025. Nominations will require six proposers who are members of the Trust. Details of members standing for election or re-election will be circulated to all Trust members with the summer issue of Worcestershire Wildlife.



Bex Jarvis

Join our map

Our Wilder Worcestershire team are having a great time meeting lots of people and community groups who are keen to help wildlife in their neighbourhoods. If you belong to a group that's helping nature, why not register yourselves on our map and help to create connections with other like-minded people and groups

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/community-action



Photo competition

If you've captured the wonder of Worcestershire's wildlife, head to www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/photography-competition for more details on how to enter this year's photo competition (deadline Monday 7th April 2025). Winning photos feature in our popular calendar.



Jill Orme

Come and say hello

Come along to chat to the membership team and enjoy The Knapp and Papermill nature reserve; there'll be refreshments too!

When: Tuesday 29th July 10 am–2 pm

Where: The Knapp and Papermill, Alfrick Pound. Car parking will be available in a neighbouring field (signposted on the day).

For more info contact membership@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org or **01905 754919** to speak to Jo, Kate or Elise.

Trustees

We are looking for one new trustee to join Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's Council of Trustees. As a trustee, you can play a major role in helping the Trust deliver its mission of nature's recovery in the county. Trustees work with the Chief Executive, other trustees, staff members and volunteers to help shape and guide our vital nature conservation work. We are seeking a new trustee with significant experience of ecology and natural heritage either professionally or through strong amateur interest.

Find out more about the role online at www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteering-opportunities/trustee or for an informal discussion please contact Mike Perry, Chief Executive, to organise a suitable time for a chat mike@worcestershirewildlifetrust.org.

Paul Lane

Happy birthday

In November the National Lottery Heritage Fund turned 30. Made possible by players of the National Lottery, this incredible fund has been one of the most important sources of funding for the Trust, enabling us to do everything from working with communities, inspiring them to help wildlife, to land purchases and reinventing Lower Smite Farm to provide an education centre, meeting

rooms and a place to demonstrate farming with nature in mind. You can find out more about how the National Lottery Heritage Fund has helped wildlife in Worcestershire by taking a look at www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/about-us/how-were-funded/national-lottery-heritage-fund



UK news

Securing the Rothbury Estate for nature



Simonside, on the Rothbury Estate, is set to become a flagship site for nature conservation in the UK

Duncan Hutt, Northumberland WT

The Wildlife Trusts have purchased part of the Rothbury Estate in partnership with Northumberland Wildlife Trust and have launched a £30 million appeal to secure the entire estate – for nature and the nation. The charities have agreed a two-phase purchase agreement over two years.

The 3,800-hectare estate has an important place in the hearts of Northumbrians. By acquiring the Rothbury Estate, Northumberland Wildlife Trust aims to enhance the rich natural heritage of the estate for future generations. A successful purchase of the entire site will avoid the land being broken up into multiple ownerships.

The current purchase includes the Simonside Hills and a mixture of lowland, woods, riverside and farmland. Notable wildlife includes curlews, red

grouse, merlins, cuckoos, mountain bumblebees, emperor moths and red squirrels.

Mike Pratt, Chief Executive of Northumberland Wildlife Trust, says:

‘We’re very excited to be part of a once in a generation opportunity for securing a stunning area of countryside where people and nature can thrive side by side.

‘We’re looking forward to working with local people to create an exemplar of how nature, farming and community are integrated – something local people can feel immensely proud of. We’ll be talking and listening to people who live and work in the area over the coming months to evolve a long-term plan for the Estate that respects its traditions and the livelihoods that depend on it.’

People power

Innovation, new research and a whale-sized volunteering effort has helped The Wildlife Trusts’ learn more about changes in UK seas in the 2024 marine review. Seaside volunteers clocked over 12,000 hours backing wildlife initiatives around UK shores. This included recording sightings of humpback

whales, white-beaked dolphins and climate-indicator species including colourful sea slugs and mauve jellyfish. Volunteers also gathered almost 3,000 kilogrammes of rubbish by hand from UK beaches on clean-ups organised by Wildlife Trusts.

UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



1 Celebrating seal pups

Cumbria Wildlife Trust is celebrating seal pups born at its coastal nature reserve at South Walney near Barrow for the 10th year running. The growth of the grey seal colony from single figures in the 1980s and 90s to over 500 since breeding began in 2015 is a great conservation success story. wtru.st/Cumbria-seal-pups

2 Mini beasts

The smallest beetle in Europe has been discovered by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. The tiny beetle, *Baranowskiella ehnstromi*, found at Rutland Water Nature Reserve, measures just 0.4mm in length and feeds on spores of a bracket fungus. This is the third British record for the species and first outside East Anglia. wtru.st/Rutland-beetle



Mark Hamblin/2020V/IS/IGN

3 Pine martens return

Fifteen pine martens were released at secret locations on Dartmoor after a 100-year absence. After two years of meticulous planning and consultation with local communities, the reintroduction, led by Devon Wildlife Trust and seven partners, is an historic step in the restoration of the region’s woodlands and wildlife. wtru.st/pine-martens-return



Worcestershire's nature reserves

When I first started at Worcestershire Wildlife Trust in 2009, with a new suite of nature reserves to manage, the first site I visited was Brotheridge Green Old Railway Line. Coming from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, where I helped to manage a very large, open wetland reserve I was a little bemused by this small tree-lined fragment of the disused railway line that once ran from Tewkesbury to Malvern. At 1.8 hectares laid out in a thin line of scrubbed up embankments and railway cuts with a small garden shed for birdwatching, it is a far cry from the 40 hectares reserves we now prefer to purchase as part of our strategy to create more resilient spaces for nature in Worcestershire.

What I learned over eight years directly managing this historic remnant of Victorian industry and 1950s railway closures, through repeated mowing and raking, cutting of scrub to let in light and relying on the enthusiastic support of our ever-willing volunteers, was the value of even such a small place. Yes, the ballast that had formed the foundation for the track created a set of unusual lime-loving plants that in turn supported butterflies, such as small coppers, holly blues and the more unusual white-letter hairstreaks, and the blossoming hawthorn and blackthorn make it a wonderful place to walk in spring. But just as importantly, the old railway, even broken up under multiple ownership, acts as a corridor through the landscape for wildlife to move and thrive. Nestled amongst other nearby reserves – Boynes Coppice with its brilliant show of green-winged orchids, Nash's Meadows, gifted to us in 2017 and undergoing long-term restoration to wildflower meadows, and Melrose Farm Meadows – this southwest corner of the county offers

us a landscape recovery strategy in microcosm. I have certainly learnt a great deal about big-scale wildlife recovery from a tiny reserve.

Fast forwarding to 2025, we have continued this strategy on an ever-increasing scale with the recent appeal to purchase 16 hectares next to Hanley Dingle and our restoration of the 24 hectare Green Farm, by Monkwood, in December 2022. Converting these sites into amazing havens for wildlife takes a long time but the commitment of our members, staff and volunteers in purchasing and beginning the restoration process is what makes it possible.

Green Farm

We are pleased to report that at Green Farm we have reached the milestone of completing infrastructure and the planting of the fledgling woodland. Volunteers, staff, local residents and nearby schools planted 3,850 native broad-leaved trees. Comprising a long-term mix of wildflower meadow, woodland and scrub this addition to Monkwood will, over time, be colonised by wood white butterflies, reintroduced in 2016, as well as more common species. Perhaps dormice will follow shortly after, although woodland wildflowers and fungi that thrive at the older part of the wood may take up to a hundred years to get established.



Pete Walkden

Tiddesley Wood

Our existing reserves continue to need regular management and, sometimes, an extra helping hand. You will read on pages 20–21 that we have lost the fight to protect Tiddesley Wood from the effects of a proposed housing development on its eastern boundary. While we believe this would be extremely damaging to this Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) woodland, with its ancient ground flora, woodland bird populations and locally uncommon bat populations, Tiddesley Wood is already one of our more heavily visited woods.

Even without the risk of the proposed development we have been increasingly concerned about recreational pressure on wildlife at Tiddesley as visitor numbers have steadily increased and new paths have sprung up into new, previously undisturbed parts of the wood. While birds such as nightingales and marsh warblers are no longer in the wood, mirroring national trends, even common breeding species such as dunnocks and willow warblers are at risk from frequent disturbance and secretive winter visitors, such as woodcock, are also under threat if quieter areas start to see more people blazing a new path.

With this in mind, we have decided to close a number of the unauthorised paths in the wood and, through better signage and path management, encourage visitors to stick to approved routes. We are already talking to visitors to explain our plans and the reasoning behind our decision and, whilst we

recognise that some of our visitors may be upset to find a familiar route they may have walked for several years blocked off, as a Wildlife Trust we will always put wildlife first on our nature reserves. If we don't protect these important havens for wildlife, then who will? We intend to monitor the effects of the path closures and hope to see a corresponding improvement in bird numbers especially.

Balancing public access and exposure to nature against the needs for the protection of wildlife is a difficult tightrope to walk, particularly as our population increases and becomes more mobile and better informed about places that might previously have been local 'secrets'. We want people to appreciate and support wildlife and, to an extent, this comes through encountering and being amongst nature. If, however, we are to turn around the ongoing declines we see in many of our long-established and loved species we will need to make sure there are places where wildlife comes first.

Thankfully, our reserves are still amazing and surprising places for nature. Whether mammals, birds, fungi or magnificent wildflower meadows, our reserves are still hotspots for the best wildlife Worcestershire has to offer and places for new wildlife to colonise through reintroductions or as species move to adapt to a changing climate.



Rob Allen, WWT reserves team leader who has spent his career trying to reverse the ecological decline.



HIGH FIVE HIGHLIGHTS



Jon Hawkins, Surrey Hills Photography



Betsy Digger



Wendy Carter



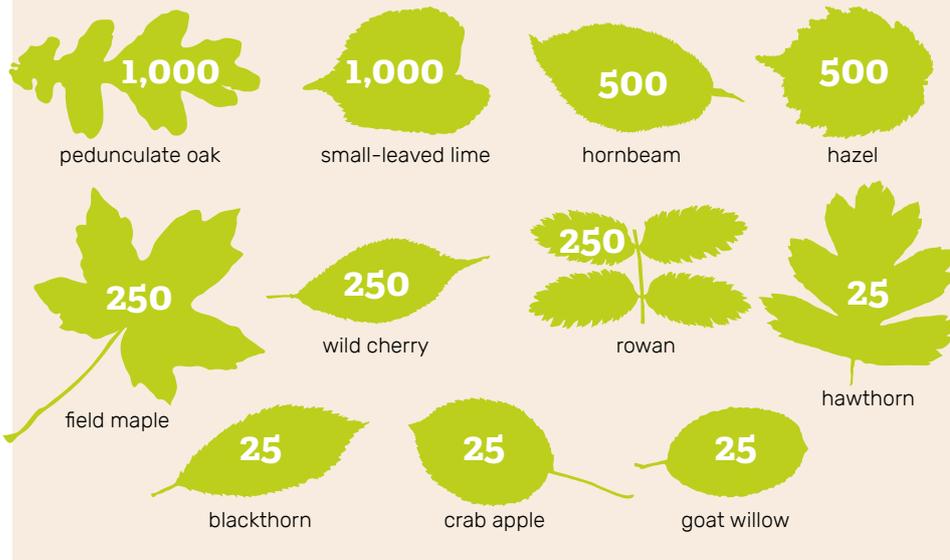
Rosemary Winnall



Penny Frith

1. Badger at dusk
2. Goldcrest in a conifer
3. Early purple orchid along a woodland path
4. Colt's-foot on a field edge
5. Early bumblebee on flowers in your garden

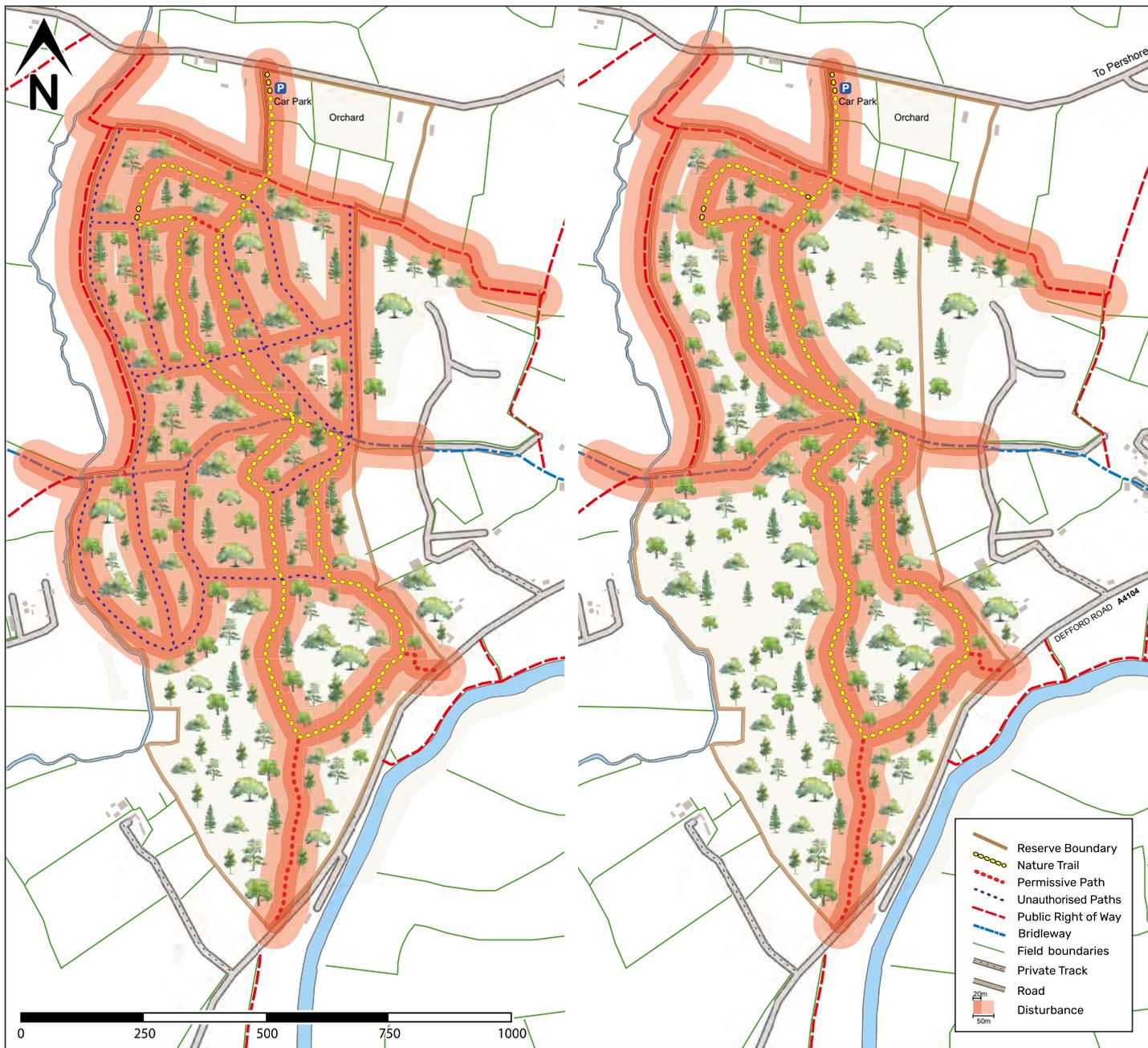
3,850 native broad-leaved trees planted at Green Farm



(Below) Map demonstrating the levels of disturbance around paths in Tiddesley Wood. Research suggests that people walking along a path disturb wildlife within 20m on either side of that path (dark orange). If walking dogs, that disturbance is around 50m on either side of the path (light orange). If dogs are off the lead, this can increase to over 100m. Dogs, regardless of size or friendliness, are seen as predators by birds and other wildlife.

The map on the left shows both authorised and unauthorised paths. The map on the right shows how much more space wildlife will have once unauthorised paths are no longer used. Four kilometres of paths will remain available for use.

Daniel Smith, Aspect Design



Anife Turchin, Aspect Design

Worcestershire's



handsome hoverflies

Hoverflies rock! Not only are they amongst the most important of our 'beneficial' insects, with some species delivering pollination services and devouring troublesome aphids, they're also some of our best-looking invertebrates (with some great names). With 285 species recorded to date (and more added every year), the nine species here represent just a fraction of the shapes and sizes found in Britain.

Hoverfly lifestyles vary greatly and there's no doubt they have some odd habits, so whether you prefer a slurry dwelling *Eristalis*, an ant-bothering *Xanthogramma* or a bumblebee lookalike *Volucella*, there's something to excite everyone here.



Find out more:

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wild_about_hoverflies

Report what you spot:

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings



Steve Bloomfield, WWT Senior Conservation Officer, is a keen bird and insect botherer.



Wendy Carter

**Bumblebee plumehorn
*Volucella bombylans***

A fantastic bumblebee mimic, these insects lay their eggs in bumblebee nests where the larvae feed on detritus and dead bee larvae. There are three different colour morphs, making this a so-called polymorphic mimic, with the commonest two forms closely resembling red-tailed and white-tailed bumblebees. Common and widespread, the very territorial males are easy to spot as they repeatedly return to the same sunlit leaf to bask.



Wendy Carter

**Marmalade hoverfly
*Episyrphus balteatus***

With larvae that are voracious aphid eaters, these are our commonest species. They're usually easy to identify by the combination of double black bars on an orange background on the abdomen, a combination unique in Britain. These are one of a number of migrant hoverflies, with the UK population bolstered by an estimated four billion animals from further south in Europe every summer.



Wendy Carter

**Hornet hoverfly
*Vollucella zonaria***

Britain's largest hoverfly, this is an impressive hornet mimic. Its eggs are laid inside wasp and hornet nests and the larvae feed on dead young and detritus left behind by the hosts. It's one of several species that are rapidly moving north through the UK, perhaps as a result of climate change. Previously confined to the south coast, these are now regularly seen in Worcestershire summers.



Wendy Carter

Orange-belted leaf-licker
Xylota segnis

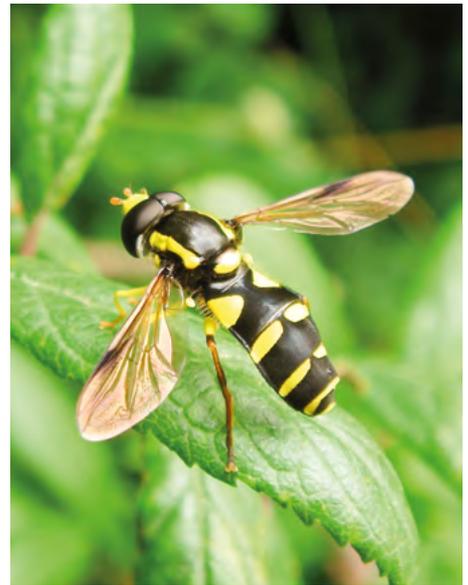
The most widespread member of its family, they mimic sawflies and spider-hunting wasps, with an elongated body and very long legs. Unlike most hoverflies, *Xylota* specialise in eating honeydew and pollen from leaf surfaces, rather than feeding at flowers. They shuttle back and forth across the leaf surface, hovering up food in a very distinctive manner and their mouthparts have evolved adaptations for dealing with lots of pollen.



John Bingham

Grey-backed snout
Rhingia rostrata

One of two similar species, both identifiable by their long, beaked rostrums (the 'snout' on their faces). This adaptation allows them to feed in deeper flowers, such as red campions, that other hoverflies can't reach. This southern species is moving north while its relative, the common-snout *Rhingia campestris*, is becoming increasingly scarce in Worcestershire, perhaps because their range is also shifting north in response to climate change.



Steve Bloomfield

Superb ant-hill hoverfly
Xanthogramma pedissequus

A truly striking species, European authors have also called this wonderful creature the 'superb day-glower'. Amazingly, the larvae develop inside ant nests where they eat aphids being tended by the ants! It's one of three similar-looking species that make this apparently odd choice. They seem to prefer open grassland and grassy open places in scrub and woodland, perhaps favouring nests of black ants and/or yellow meadow ants.



Wendy Carter

Common dronefly *Eristalis tenax*

This species is an excellent honeybee mimic. Its 'rat-tailed' larvae, which look like tubby maggots, sport long tail-like breathing tubes and develop in wet, nutrient-rich places like compost heaps and slurry pits, feeding on yeasts and microbes associated with rotting vegetation. Adult females can survive the winter in warm cavities, meaning they are one of very few species that can be found on mild, sunny winter days.



Wendy Carter

Batman hoverfly *Myathropa florea*

This is one of our best-looking flies. Named for the 'Batman' mark on the thorax (between the wings) adults are variably coloured, with brighter individuals apparently more common in late summer. The larvae live in water-filled containers from old buckets to rot holes in trees. Add some leaves and twigs to a water-filled plant pot to encourage breeding in your garden.



Wendy Carter

Humming syrphus *Syrphus ribesii*

One of several similar species, this lovely animal is very common and can occur in large numbers around trees and woodland. Males can often be found hovering or perched in sunlit patches amongst dappled shade and the vibration of their wings forms part of the lovely background buzz sometimes heard in woodland on summer days.

Tiddelsey Wood and Orchard Farm



Wendy Carter

In existence, in one form or other, for over 6,000 years, Tiddelsey Wood is an ancient semi-natural woodland that's home to myriad species of wildlife. It covers more than 80 hectares and sits on the western edge of Pershore.

Management of the wood passed from the Westminster Estate when it was leased by the Forestry Commission in 1952. During this period most hardwood was clear-felled and the wood was planted with a range of conifer species. This planting largely failed, though some areas remain.

We bought the woodland in 1985 and it was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) the following year. This ancient lowland woodland has a nationally important mix of trees, shrubs, woodland flowers, birds and invertebrates. In addition to the SSSI woodland there is an old plum orchard, a new plum, perry pear and damson orchard as well as a large grassland with hedgerows and scrub areas planted to provide food, shelter and breeding habitat for birds and insects.

The nature reserve forms an important corridor for wildlife, linking the Severn and Avon Vales to the Bow Brook and the Forest of Feckenham.

Managing for wildlife

The long-term plan for the woodland is continuing to manage the transformation from a conifer plantation on an ancient woodland site back to a mixed native broadleaved woodland, with areas of short and long rotation coppice, scattered veteran and notable trees and a path and ride network that provides opportunities for ground and shrub nesting birds.

In the orchard we work to prolong the life of the old trees and continue planting the next generation with local traditional varieties to ensure availability of suitable habitat for wildlife like bullfinches and noble chafers. Worcestershire is a stronghold for the rare and beautiful metallic-

green noble chafer beetles that are found in traditional orchards.

A serious threat

Despite the nationally recognised importance for wildlife of Tiddelsey Wood and its orchards and grasslands, we have been fighting a seemingly continuous battle to stop development on fields next to it (Orchard Farm). In combatting various proposals we've had to consider both the strategic development requirements of the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) and the practical details of very refined planning proposals.

Along the way we've directed countless officer hours to developing appropriate responses to the SWDP, successfully arguing, along with Natural England and local people, that Orchard Farm should be removed as an allocated site for 450 houses. We've repeatedly made the point that our concerns are not simply because we own and manage the wood but that the situation at



Paul Lane

Tiddesley should be seen as a proxy for similar, precious designated sites.

Being serious about a county where nature can begin to recover means working with colleagues in councils and statutory agencies to take the hard steps to protect the wildlife we already have. Sites like Tiddesley are the crucial building blocks in delivering a nature recovery network and it's essential that, wherever possible, we strive to prevent harmful development that would inevitably undermine not just the wood but any efforts to expand it in future.

Given the contentious issues involved in the proposed development, and having seen it withdrawn from the Local Plan, we objected to a planning application for 300 houses submitted in 2023. Ultimately this proceeded all the way to a public inquiry, which took place last November. Public inquiries are the most formal way that planning applications can be considered (other than at a judicial review) and involve exploration of relevant matters, including wildlife considerations,

through cross examination of evidence by barristers, under the direction of a planning inspector. Steve Bloomfield, our Senior Conservation Officer for Planning, attended and submitted evidence on behalf of the Trust in support of Wychavon District Council's case, which sought to refuse the application.

The process can, at times, seem to be stacked against the objectors and council, with developers able to direct very considerable sums of money towards highly skilled teams of advocates. In this case, we also paid for our own legal advice and worked hard to develop the best arguments possible. Sadly, our efforts were to no avail and at the end of January we received news that the planning inspector had allowed the appeal, meaning that the proposed development can now go ahead. This is extremely disappointing and the resulting increase in disturbance from more visitors, especially with dogs, and likely cat predation from the new houses will

undoubtedly have an impact on the wildlife in the wood. We were able to secure some mitigation for the harm caused but this will not be enough to completely offset the damage.

We will continue to work with the Council to ensure that the inspector's decision, which details planning conditions that include protection for wildlife, is implemented as sensitively as possible, seeking to limit the damage as far as we can.

 Read more on page 17.
For our reaction in full:
www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/our-position-proposed-orchard-farm-development



Helen Woodman,
Head of Conservation, whose love of nature began because she loves being active outdoors in all weathers.

The secret lives of Orchids



A walk through
nature's hidden
treasures

Bee orchid,
Ophrys apifera

Lady's slipper orchid,
Cypripedium calceolus

Neil Aldridge

Will Atkins

When I started my career in conservation, the 'Vacancy – warden required to guard rare orchid' advertisement grabbed my attention. Yes, the job was to guard the only known population of the UK's rarest orchids in Yorkshire: the lady's slipper orchid. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust is now raising money to grow it and secure its survival.

Years later I found myself researching the lady's slipper orchid at Durham Wildlife Trust, when I stumbled across an article describing this orchid in the Trust's Hawthorn Dene nature reserve. With sadness I read that in 1926 the last of this stunning plant had been picked and given as a gift to a woman by her admirer. UK law now protects wild plants from being picked in this way but this story is a stark reminder of the fragility of our natural heritage.

Orchids are one of the most diverse groups of plants on the planet. Over 1,000 genera. More than 25,000 species. They are the largest and most highly evolved family of flowering plants.

There are around 57 native orchid species found in Britain (the number varying depending on your source). The number of species is fairly consistent depending on where you live in the country. Hampshire has 30 plus species, Kent and Sussex about 27–28 species each, the same number as the whole of Scotland! Wales has 32. My native Durham and Northumberland have 27 species. Some are common and others really quite rare.

My children say, 'You're not allowed favourites!' This rule applies to orchids and orchid sites as much as anything else in my life. I can't place one above another, all are special. Allowances are made, with an annual

pilgrimage to 'check in on old friends'. Of orchids, some are work friends and we check how they are doing. A reward for past hard endeavours. Like the early purple orchids

that greeted me on a walk through an ancient semi-natural woodland on the Durham coast. In past years, Wildlife Trust volunteers removed non-native trees to allow light to reach the woodland floor to restore the ancient woodland native plant community. Imagine my pleasure on a hot May day as the cool shaded woodland trail led me to the exact spot. A small flush of early purple orchids bathed in sunlight, accompanied by a chorus of bird song and the trickle of the nearby stream.

This walk, I and many Wildlife Trust supporters and colleagues enjoy through spring and summer. Ten orchid species to spot, if you get your timing right. Frog orchid (their flowers look like frogs, their hind legs jiggling a dance) rounds off the walk. Every year the same fear fills my head, 'Where have they all gone?' Then sense prevails and I remember I just need to look a little harder.



Frog orchid,
Dactylorhiza viridis

Kieron Huston



Early purple orchid,
Orchis mascula

Niall Bervie/2020VISION

THE SECRET LIVES OF ORCHIDS

Down on my hands and knees, I focus on a spot and like a magic-eye picture the hidden forest of frog orchids is revealed.

The Plant Atlas 2020 described this species as potentially the UK's fastest declining orchid; the decline is linked to agricultural improvement, undergrazing and more recently drought.

Climate and weather are important. For the pyramidal orchid, the plant's basal leaves appear in late autumn and die down the following summer. This growth strategy can leave this orchid vulnerable to climatic differences with hard cold winters leading to frost damage that jeopardises a plant's success in the coming spring.

The county flower of the Isle of Wight, the pyramidal orchid prefers soils rich in calcium. Like those of the island, the majority of UK orchids prefer calcium-rich soils.

Orchids can produce thousands of very tiny seeds, the greater butterfly orchid producing up to 25,000 seeds per capsule. The fact this sheer number of ultra light seed can be carried by the wind, ensures orchids are able to spread their progeny far and wide. Their success is determined by the environmental conditions they find. If we are to truly restore nature, orchids have many lessons they can teach us. Protecting 30 per cent of land for nature – a commitment made by our government – will mean, in time, some orchid species will find new areas suitable for their growth.

Watching nature reclaim its place in the landscape will be a privilege I thought we may not get to see. But there are examples where people have been doing just that for a number of years.

The dark-red helleborine orchid

has been monitored for over 30 years at Bishop Middleham Quarry in County Durham. 2024 was a record year with 3,380 flowering spikes. Surveying at Bishop Middleham is a pleasant late summers evening event with longstanding friends and new enthusiasts. Spare a thought for the orchid surveyors of The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire. This intrepid group spend three days counting three orchid species, the man (the flower, a human body with an oddly oversized cycle helmet), musk (not smelling of musk, nationally scarce, declined by 70 per cent) and frog orchid... in late winter!

People travel far and wide to see orchids. So it's nice to finish on a story about orchids that travelled to see people. Recently Essex Wildlife Trust got the opportunity to show off some of their orchids to the King and Queen at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. 'Orchids in the Wild – The Beauty

**Southern marsh orchid,
*Dactylorhiza praetermissa***



**Pyramidal orchid,
*Anacamptis pyramidalis***



Vaughn Matthews

Guy Edwards/2020VISION

of Nature' showcased the county's native orchids and the Trust's important conservation work. The orchids making the journey were common spotted, green-winged, pyramidal and man orchids. I wish I could have seen the effect the VIP's (very important plants) had on the Royal visitors.

Orchids highlight just what is at risk if we don't address the causes of the nature emergency. Orchids have declined like other plants and species. Restoring habitats that support orchids will have benefits for a vast array of other species. Of my much loved orchid walk the woodland holds three orchid species but is home to hundreds of other plants and animals not to mention fungi and micro-organisms. In the meadow, six orchids make their home amongst herbs and grasses, 44 different species in a metre square.

If you were to do just one thing in the coming spring

and summer, make your own orchid story. If you were to do another, ensure the places we should find these special plants are restored and conserved. The more orchids the merrier.

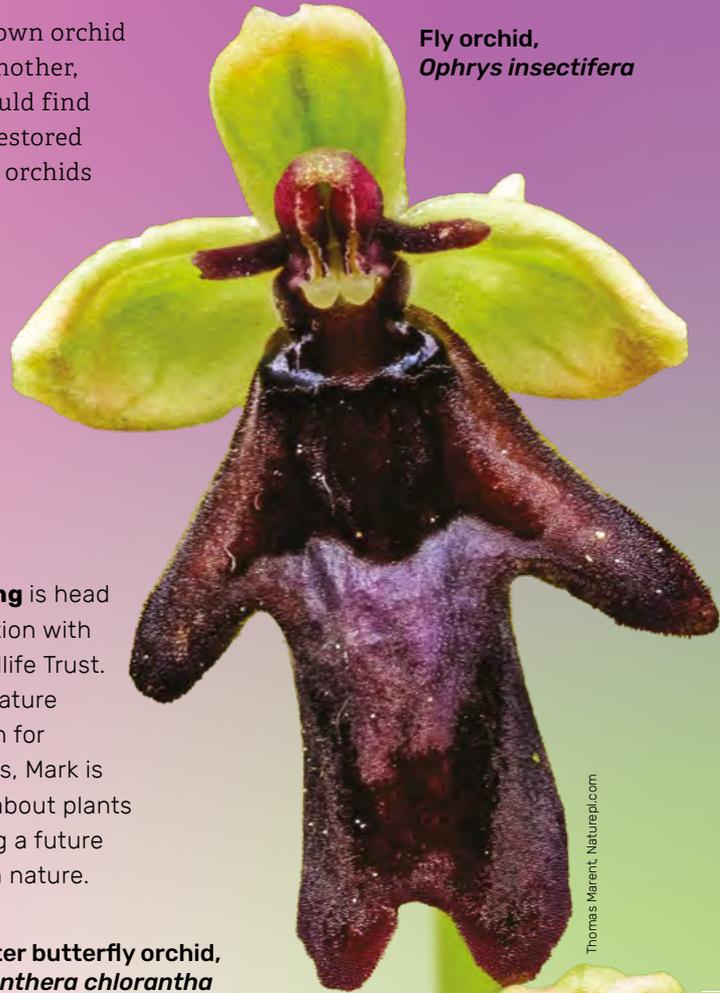


To find an orchid haven near you and see these masters of mimicry for yourself, visit www.wildlifetrusts.org/where_to_see_orchids



Mark Dinning is head of conservation with Durham Wildlife Trust. Working in nature conservation for over 20 years, Mark is passionate about plants and securing a future thriving with nature.

Fly orchid,
Ophrys insectifera



Thomas Marant, Naturepic.com

Common spotted orchid,
Dactylorhiza fuchsii



Paul Lane

Greater butterfly orchid,
Platanthera chlorantha



Jim Higham

Wild notebook

Mustn't forget

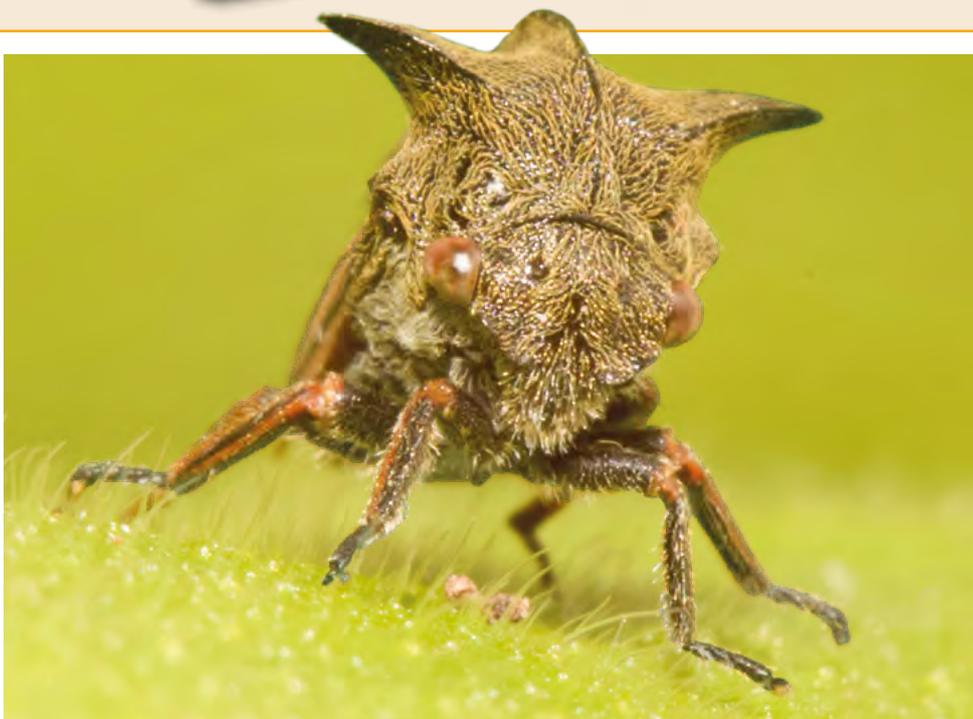
Five things to photograph:

- Moths around an outside all-night light
- A hawthorn tree full of blossom
- A mining bee nest hole in the lawn surrounded with fresh soil
- A pair of mute swans, their nest and cygnets
- A hoverfly laying an egg

Five things to do:

- Sit in a bluebell wood and relish the moment
- Take a look on the underside of leaves to search for creatures and eggs
- Follow an old wall to see what's growing on it
- Learn a new bird song
- Keep a look out for hedgehog droppings on lawns

All photographs by Rosemary Winnall



Horned treehopper **Centrotus cornutus**

Coming face to face with one of these little bugs provides one of nature's surprises. They may be found on herbaceous plants and trees between April and July. Their protruding horns and long back extension provide some camouflage when they are perched on twigs and may also be defensive. These bugs have piercing sap-sucking mouthparts, can jump, fly and even produce courtship vibration signals. Eggs are laid in the summer on herbaceous plants such as thistles and nettles. They live for up to two years and overwinter in leaf litter.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

I usually hear the calls of these secretive birds before I catch a glimpse of them flying away with their conspicuous white rumps. But this one was coming down to feed on seed in front of a bird hide and I was privileged to see this male's colours at close quarters.

**Green crab spider *Diaea dorsata***

This attractive 6mm crab spider may be found on the foliage of shrubs and trees but only in the southern half of England. The female lays her eggs inside a rolled-up leaf, which she guards. The smaller male is less well marked and has some brown on its green legs.

**Cowslips *Primula vera***

I climbed over the stile into a field of yellow, a treasured island of flowering delight. Cowslips are not common enough now to make wine or to collect bunches to adorn our tables but they are starting to return on our unsprayed verges and along the banks of new roads.

**Muslin moth *Diaphora mendica***

It was easy to spot this moth perched decorously in spring sunshine. The white, semi-transparent females can be found in the daytime, whereas the males are nocturnal and sooty brown/grey in colour. The larvae feed on various plants including docks and chickweeds.

**Hornet *Vespa crabro***

Walking through the woods in late spring a log pile attracted our attention and, as we paused, a queen hornet slowly appeared from under the bark. She seemed reluctant to fly, needing to wake up slowly after her long sleep and gather strength before searching for her first meal of the year.

Bog beacon *Mitrula paludosa*

These beacons can light up damp ditches, soggy spots and boggy places in spring woodland. The main strands of the fungus help to break down rotting leaves, mosses, twigs and algae before sending up their yellow sporing heads, which emerge out of the water when conditions are right.

**Crucifer bug *Eurydema oleracea***

This shieldbug (also called cabbage or brassica bug) overwinters as an adult and so can be found on warm spring days often near the larval foodplants such as garlic mustard or white dead-nettle. The dark metallic ground colour may be overlain with red, yellow, cream or, less commonly, orange markings.



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

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings

**Rosemary Winnall,**

WWT member who is interested in all aspects of wildlife, especially when linked to the Wyre Forest.

What's brown and has long ears?



Elizabeth Pimley

The brown long-eared bat's name is dull but accurate and it fails to do credit to one of our most amazing indigenous mammals.

It's all about those ears.

The majority of the UK's 18 bat species catch and eat their food on the wing, using echolocation to home in on their flying insectivorous prey. But some moths have evolved acute hearing that allows them to take evasive action at the sound of those echolocation calls, often dropping out of the sky onto a nearby plant or tree.

In response, the brown long-eared bat has developed a pair of extraordinary ears that are sensitive enough to hear an insect walking on a leaf. This allows them to glean their prey straight off vegetation. Their super-sensitive hearing also means that their echolocating calls can be quieter, allowing them to hunt flying food more stealthily, hence their nickname: the whispering bat.

Spring is when bats awaken from

hibernation and start to venture out into the night sky. You might not see a brown long-eared bat in flight – they tend to fly quite low to the ground in cluttered vegetation – but you might spot signs that they are close by. They will often make use of feeding perches, taking larger insects to a favourite spot for eating at their leisure. Come the morning, a pile of discarded moth wings on the ground is a telltale sign that a brown long-eared bat has been using the spot. These can be a common site in porches and open barns – keep an eye out!

We are fortunate that Worcestershire is a great place to see and hear bats, including the brown long-eared bat. One of Worcestershire Bat Group's favourite sites is The Knapp and Papermill nature reserve where we lead a bat walk every May. It's common for us to identify eight or more bat species in a single night, including the brown long-eared. The species is also known to use the many bat boxes on the reserve.



For more information about the Worcestershire Bat Group
www.worcestershirebats.org.uk



Matthew Terry is Chair of Worcestershire Bat Group and a trustee of the Bat Conservation Trust.



Brown long-eared bat, examined under license during a bat box check at The Knapp and Papermill

Mike Glyde

Seasonal pickings

Where does one start when it comes to suggesting what to look out for in spring? Ordinarily, I'd write about birds but let's look at spring through, quite literally, a different lens.

For the photographer or videographer, spring is a season where there is so much of everything doing everything and the choice of subject at which to point whatever type of camera you have is myriad.

Blossom is an extremely visible sign of spring and it's surprising just how similar the many types – pear, plum, cherry or crab apple – are. A photo is a great way to help you identify each one using a suitable guide once you get home.

In our woodlands, a progression of iconic wildflower species offer a spectacle that no-one with an eye for beauty can ignore. From the first snowdrops, through carpets of bluebells and the fragrant scent of wild garlic to the intricate beauty of

orchids. Orchids are another one of those tricky identification challenges and having access to a comprehensive guide really helps.

Taking advantage of spring's pollen are many familiar insects; classic early butterfly species – peacock, brimstone and orange tip – are joined, from June onward, by an even greater range of species. It may surprise you, as it did me, to learn that there are 24 species of bumblebee in the UK, so it's worth looking out for newly emerged queens in spring. Narrow down identification by noting the tail colour, which will be either white/buff, red/orange or ginger/yellow, the body colour and the pattern of any stripes.

All this photographic bounty demands a respectful and responsible

approach. The chances of disturbing nesting birds or damaging delicate flora are unavoidable unless you ensure you stay on footpaths and use a zoom or long focal length lens for any distance subjects. With our wildlife under so much pressure, preventing harm or damage to flora and fauna must be at the forefront of any decision to get your camera out.

I obviously can't miss out birds completely. If you are awake early enough, take the opportunity to just sit and listen to the dawn chorus. In early May, 30 minutes either side of sunrise, it should be at its peak. Although there is structure to it, it is better to just let it wash over you like a wave.



Richard Clifford

Top tip

Remember that the most important watchwords of appreciating wildlife are don't **disturb**, **trample** or **pick**.



Ion Riley, WWT Community Wildlife Warden, is a lifelong birdwatcher with a recent interest in butterflies.

A fond farewell

As Colin announced his retirement in summer of last year, our Head of Conservation was quietly biding her time to announce her own departure from the Trust. As I take over the helm from Colin, I'm very sorry to also be losing Helen Woodman. She has been a resolute supporter of nature conservation wherever she has lived and worked, focussing her passion and commitment to do positive things for wildlife. We found time to chat about her time in conservation and the last 33 years with the Trust; I thanked her sincerely for everything she has achieved during her time here.

Why did you decide to join the Trust?

I've always loved the outdoors and when I was little, you'd often find me out on my bike or with my family exploring Blaise Castle and Ashton Court in Bristol or the nearby Mendips and Cotswolds.

My first job, as a surveyor in the building trade, satisfied my need to be active but the plan was really to save money to go travelling with an ecologist friend. We wanted to visit India and southeast Asia where we could indulge ourselves in the history and wildlife there. A further 15 months away working and exploring the wilds of Australia and New Zealand confirmed

that a career in nature conservation was the only thing to do.

When I came back, I started on a trainee scheme with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and it wasn't long before I became an employed trainer leading the trainee team. This was when I first crossed paths with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust; we'd been contracted to install rabbit-proof fencing at Tiddesley Wood. When the reserves officer vacancy came along a little later, I applied, was successful and began working for Andrew Fraser who managed our conservation work.

How did you find those first few years?

In December 1991, money was tight at the Trust but I led funding bids to buy things like our first BCS mower, do things like wetland management works at Wilden Marsh and to purchase more land.

Eventually, I stepped up to managing the reserves and as the Trust grew in people and landholdings so did the requirements for more funds. In 1998, as part of a national Wildlife Trusts application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, as it was then, I submitted a successful £1.8 million bid. With this, we



Helen Woodman with her Worcestershire Wildlife Medal



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust magazine, issue 61, September 1991. Helen at Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust working on a rabbit-proof fence in Tiddesley Wood

were able to restore 41 reserves, buy a new minibus and Landrover, fund bird, invertebrate and flora surveys, produce new management plans for the reserves and employ two new members of staff. The project ran for five years and transformed the scope and depth of the work for our reserves.

So you set our reserves management onto a surer footing but what else did you get up to?

I was thinking bigger, better and more joined up before John Lawton ever penned those important words. Together with colleagues, I've overseen our landholding growth from 826 hectares to 1320 hectares through a mixture of buying land adjacent to existing reserves or purchasing new stepping stones in the landscape.

Developing a landscape-scale approach and starting to work on projects and themes across boundaries with other Wildlife Trusts and national environmental bodies took steps forward from the mid-2000s and it's wonderful seeing this continually go from strength-to-strength.

Since 2018, when I was promoted to Head of Conservation, I've been making the most of my experience and skills to further expand the reserves team and trainee programme as well as develop our work in the wider

countryside, leading to partnerships with Worcestershire County Council and Severn Trent.

We're working closely with our colleagues in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire to deliver an Environmental Land Management Test and Trial for land management plans, Severn Treescapes and our longstanding commitment to working with our Facilitation Fund members. These projects focus on collaborating with landowners, assisting them in receiving grants to conduct work that promotes nature's recovery.

You've been here for 33 years and have seen a lot of changes; what's been the biggest?

Technology! When I arrived there were only two word processors and they were located in the admin office. We'd jostle for time on them so I'd often stay late just to get access to write management plans.

What's been your proudest moment?

There have been so many. I've been able, for example, to negotiate land purchases that we might only have dreamt of in the early days and some of these have been many years in coming to fruition. However, in 2021 I was awarded the Worcestershire Wildlife Medal for services to nature

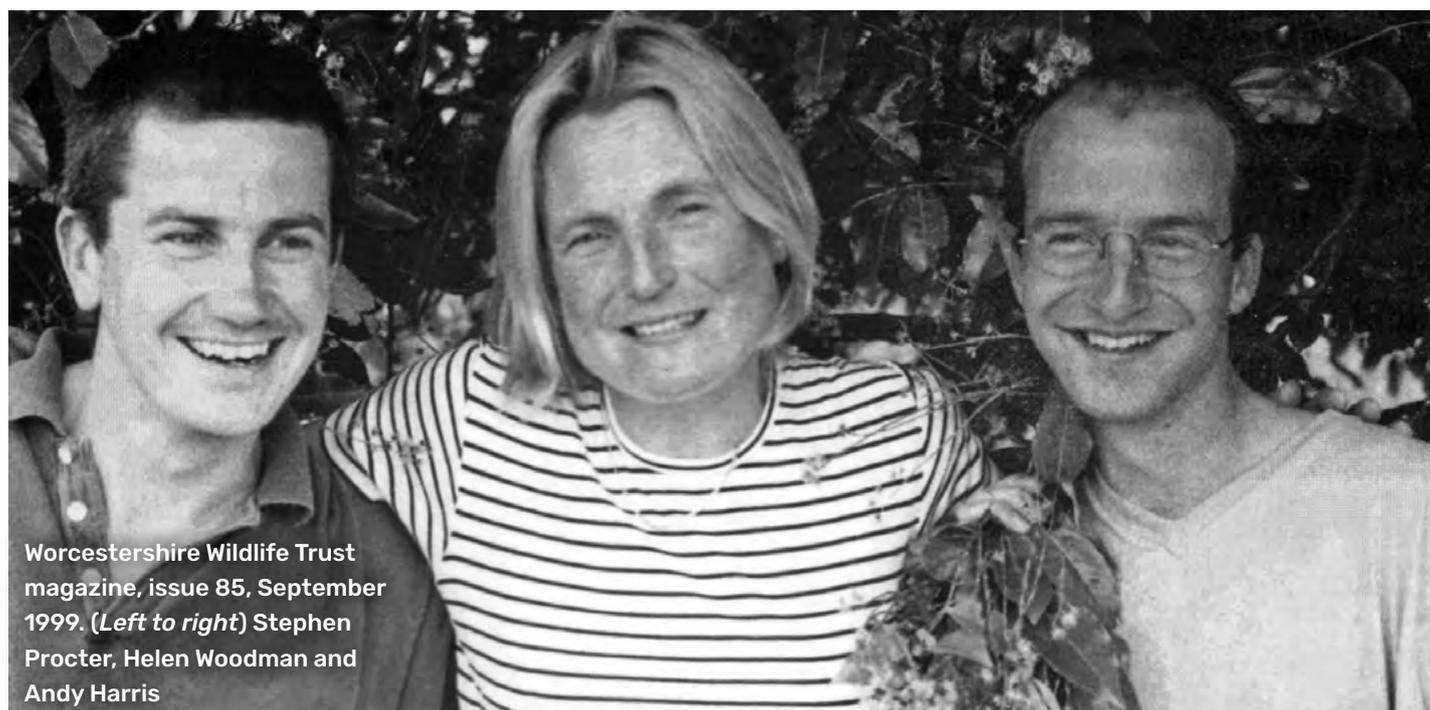
conservation in Worcestershire after working alongside the guiding skills of Colin Raven, the Trust's Director for 37 years. To be listed amongst the ranks of so many people who have made such an outstanding difference to wildlife in Worcestershire really is an honour.



Helen Woodman, Head of Conservation, whose love of nature began because she loves being active outdoors in all weathers.



Mike Perry, WWT Chief Executive Officer. Mike and family are Trust members and live in the Vale of Evesham.



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust magazine, issue 85, September 1999. (Left to right) Stephen Procter, Helen Woodman and Andy Harris

Harry Green

Pond life

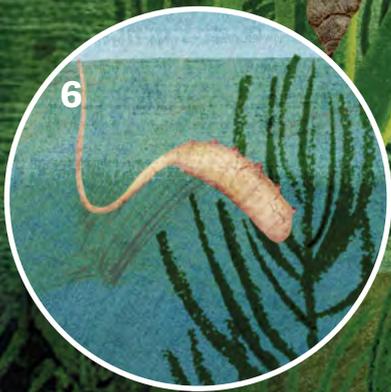
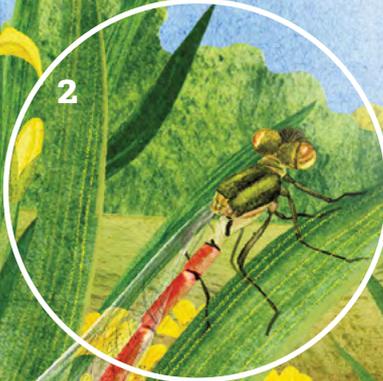
The best way to boost wildlife in your garden

1. Yellow flag iris

There are lots of water iris species around the world but only one real choice for UK ponds, in my opinion. The yellow flag iris, the only aquatic iris native to the UK.

2. Large red damselfly

On a sunny spring day there is always at least one red damselfly hovering, like a tiny helicopter, over my pond. These creatures live out their entire lives before your eyes and their nymphs Hoover up mozzie larvae.



3. Marsh marigolds

There are few sights more cheerful than a clump of bright yellow marsh marigolds. Think buttercups but bigger and framed by dramatic dark foliage. They provide a hiding place for frogs and nectar for insects.

4. Common frog

We have three. All slightly different colours. My wife insists she recognises each one. You'll be spellbound as they lay their spawn. The tiny black dots in the centre evolve into surprisingly rapacious tadpoles then majestic frogs.

5. Pond algae

Learn to love your algae. It is the bottom of the food chain and without it your pond would be a lot less enticing.

6. Rat-tailed maggot

This is one of my favourite pond creatures. Think of maggots but with snorkels attached to their bums. Except because rat-tailed maggots are aquatic, they are wonderfully clean and mutate into beautiful hoverflies.

7. Hoglouse

Hoglice are an aquatic relative of the woodlouse. And before you get sniffy about these little lice, you should know they are one of the most ancient animal species on earth at more than 300 million years old.

8. Hornwort

This is one of the workhorses of a thriving pond. Hornwort is a dark green plant that floats beneath the surface releasing life-giving oxygen. But beware, just like algae, happy hornwort will grow like topsy.

Boosting the wildlife in your garden couldn't be simpler or more exciting.

What you need is a garden pond.

Believe me you won't regret it, says the BBC's Justin Rowlett.

There'll be a little digging. You need to go a bit deeper than you'd expect. Just over a metre is good. All the wonderful pond creatures that are going to make their home in your garden need somewhere to shelter away from the ice that will form in winter.

Then you'll need a pond liner, gravel, some native UK pond plants and aquatic compost bags. Then you just fill it with tap water and wait. This is when the magic happens.

During the first week or so your pond will go a sickly shade of green as algae makes itself at home. If you're lucky, you'll get your first creature in the second or third week. Mine was a hoglouse, a watery cousin of the woodlouse.

Next came mosquito larvae. I had loads, wriggling and squirming beneath the surface. I was transfixed – my wife was not so impressed. But don't worry, they are the lure that is going to tempt in other creatures for whom mosquito larvae are the tastiest of treats.

The nymphs of dragonflies and damselflies can't get enough of them. Frogs and newts love them too. And if any do manage to hatch into actual mozzies, they'll be dinner for swallows, swifts and bats.

What you've created is an entire ecosystem, an intricate food web. The algae is food for the insects that are food for the frogs that are food for hedgehogs. You get the picture.

When you find yourself wondering why you are spending so long just staring at your new pond here's the answer: what is unfolding before you is nothing less than the story of life on earth.



Justin Rowlett is the BBC's first ever climate editor. He describes his job as reporting from the front

line of climate change. Justin is also a huge fan of ponds. He put his in three years ago and hasn't looked back.

We are nature



I've been incredibly lucky to have had wildlife encounters that left me feeling deeply connected to nature. Some of the most memorable were in Galápagos. This remote, volcanic archipelago and its nutrient-rich waters have produced a magnificent abundance of life. Marine iguanas, fur seals and blue-footed boobies are entirely unphased by your presence here, so you feel like part of nature, not just an observer. In the water, I've spent hours playing with enigmatic sea lions as they invite you to chase them.

In the UK, one of my favourite wild places is Loch of the Lowes in Scotland – a truly magical place. For me it's just as thrilling to see signs of beavers around the Loch, from coppiced vegetation to beaver chips, as it is to see them with my own eyes. It's wonderful to witness these crucial ecosystem engineers recovering here and across the UK, after being hunted to extinction in the sixteenth century.

But in my work, I've also seen how nature is bowing under the pressures of the modern world. I've reported on mile-long rafts of waste flowing down the Citarum River in Indonesia, made up of plastic sent 'away' by the West, and of thousands of sachets sold by global corporations – despite developing countries having no recycling infrastructure to deal with it. This was one of the most eye-opening moments of my career. Our unrestrained cycles of production and consumption in the global north, and our throwaway culture, are all destroying nature, that we need to survive.

Every species on earth has evolved over millions of years to carry out a function that maintains the health of ecosystems. And ecosystems, in turn, keep the planet healthy, as

part of the interconnected web of life. We humans have a role to play too but many of us have become so disconnected from nature that we've forgotten this simple truth.

To turn things around, we must place nature at the heart of every decision, across all sectors of society. It's encouraging that ecological economists are working to transform our economic model, so that nature and societal well-being are prioritised above profits. I'm also bolstered by the traditional ecological knowledge of indigenous communities, who live in harmony with nature. This crucial knowledge system, combined with western conservation practices, can deliver better, collaborative outcomes for people and nature.

Collaboration is our superpower, and this is equally true of The Wildlife Trusts. Our collective strength as a federation of 46 Wildlife Trusts knows no bounds! The more we collaborate and combine our knowledge and experience, the faster the ripple effect of change can flow. As part of our community, you can play a very real part in the change our planet needs, by sharing our stories, supporting our campaigns and volunteering with us. Lastly, perhaps most importantly, in these challenging times, my advice is to take a break from the news and get outside. Notice the sunlight through the trees, the sound of birds, and breathe. Connect with nature and everything else follows.



In late 2024, Liz Bonnin interviewed Nemonte Nenquimo, a climate leader who has dedicated her life to defending of Indigenous ancestral territory and cultural survival in the Amazon. Watch over on our YouTube channel. [wtr.u.st/Liz-Bonnin-interview](https://www.wtr.u.st/Liz-Bonnin-interview)



Whilst beavers have been recognised as a native species by the UK and Welsh governments, we are still waiting for the steps to be put in place to allow them to properly return to England and Wales, where at the moment they live in enclosures. Read The Wildlife Trusts' vision for their return:

www.wildlifetrusts.org/saving-species/beavers



Liz Bonnin is an explorer, naturalist and The Wildlife Trusts' president. She is best known for documentaries including Galapagos, Wild Alaska and Blue Planet Live. Liz's career has taken her around the world, studying animal behaviours and shining a spotlight on important environmental issues.

@lizbonnin



Your letters

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



Bob Watt

Surprise!

Opened my front door in urban south Birmingham (Stirchley) at lunchtime and found a woodcock staring at me!

Bob Watt



David Dyer

Colourful caterpillar

I found this brightly coloured chap on the towpath of the Birmingham and Worcester canal at Tardebigge when volunteering the other day. I think it's a pale tussock moth.

David Dyer

Ed: You're absolutely right.



Rich Jeynes

Leucistic blackbird

Here is a blackbird with a pretty collar; not seen this before.

Rich Jeynes

Ed: It has leucism; the feathers lack the cells responsible for melanin production, meaning that the pigment is missing.



Mark Billingham

Rare phenomenon

I found this hair ice on a dead branch.

Mark Billingham

Ed: Hair ice relies on a fungus *Exidiopsis effusa* that's found in rotting wood. At a certain temperature and as the water freezes, moisture is pushed outwards and an inhibitor in the fungus allows the strands of ice to stabilise, producing hair-like strands of ice.



Steve Weaver

Great white egret

Taken on Saturday at The Moors, Upton Warren.

Steve Weaver



Elizabeth Rolph

Look-a-like

The photo of the owl on page 19 of the December edition made me realise how realistic our carving of an owl is. Meet Norbert, carved in the trunk of a Liriodendron (tulip tree) we sadly had to have felled.

Elizabeth Rolph, Dell House, Malvern Wells (open for NGS by appointment from April)

Social feeds



Phil Blann

Goldcrest.

[@blanno](https://twitter.com/blanno)



Fin Roberts

It was so worth it getting up early to get these shots.

[@fin_roberts010](https://twitter.com/fin_roberts010)

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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.

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