Worcestershire WILDLIFE

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

July 2025, Issue No. 163

Protecting wildlife where we live

Welcome

As I write this, we're at the end of a long hot spell and in the middle of a very long dry period. While we've all enjoyed long warm evenings it's another reminder of our changing climate and pattern of more extreme weather. We talk regularly about how we can make our nature reserves more resilient to pressures like these. One way we do this is to try to extend our existing nature reserves by purchasing adjoining land. I'm delighted to say that since our spring magazine arrived with you, we completed our efforts to purchase land to extend our Hanley Dingle nature reserve near Tenbury Wells and have made a great start with efforts to purchase land near our Hill Court Farm and The Blacklands nature reserve on Longdon Marsh.

You'll also read in our magazine about progress at both our Green Farm and Dropping Well Farm sites, which we purchased two and three years ago to extend and protect existing nature reserves. Bigger, better, more and joined up spaces for wildlife is our aim. We have more exciting plans on these themes, which we'll explain more next time.

Thank you to everyone who has donated and sent us messages of encouragement. Thanks also to everyone who supported our letter writing campaign to address serious concerns we have with the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which is making its way through parliament and is currently unchanged. Please keep an eye on our website, e-newsletters and social media channels for the latest news.

Mike Perry
Chief Executive Officer

Wendy Carter

Kevin McGee

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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Discover the rest of the team on our website.

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Paul Lane

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

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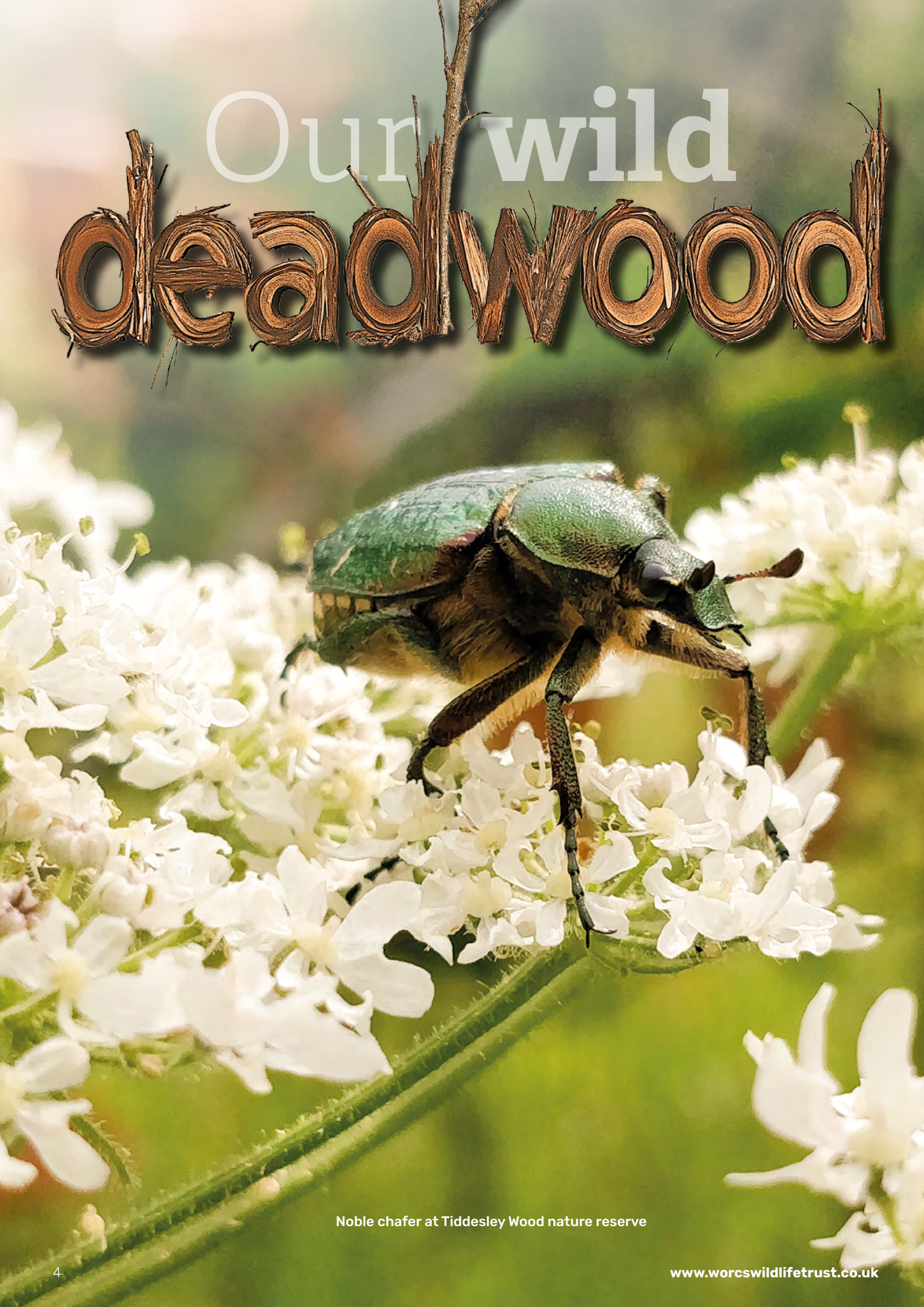
Donate From purchasing land to protecting wildlife, exciting projects near you need your support. **worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/donate**

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 deadwood



Noble chafer at Tiddesley Wood nature reserve

Deep within the wood of a veteran orchard tree something stirs . . .

Four weeks into its pupation, this tiny critter is ready to emerge, an iridescent green glittering through the hard pupal shell. As a larva it spent just over two years preparing for its metamorphosis, munching on the decaying wood. Finally, the summer starts and our beetle is ready to see the light of day.

What emerges is the appropriately named noble chafer, its beautiful emerald carapace glistening in the sunlight as it unfolds its wings and takes its first flight.

Our story started in the traditional orchard at Tiddesley Wood, The Harry Green Reserve, surrounded by beautiful old fruit trees. While all the fruit trees here look particularly aged, one apple tree seems to stand out.

Its trunk crooked and gnarled, a fissure running vertically down the bark with clear signs of a fungal infection – many would say this tree is past its prime. Far from it; in its old age this apple tree has become a skyscraper full of life. Exposed deadwood is colonised by fungi, creating rot holes that provide an abundance of food for a fascinating variety of deadwood-loving insects, which in turn are fed on by insectivorous birds and mammals. Cracks in the bark act as roosts for bats as well as shelters for small mammals and, all this time, the tree still acts as a nectar source when it blooms in the spring. It even drops its fruit at the end of summer, offering food to a multitude of species.

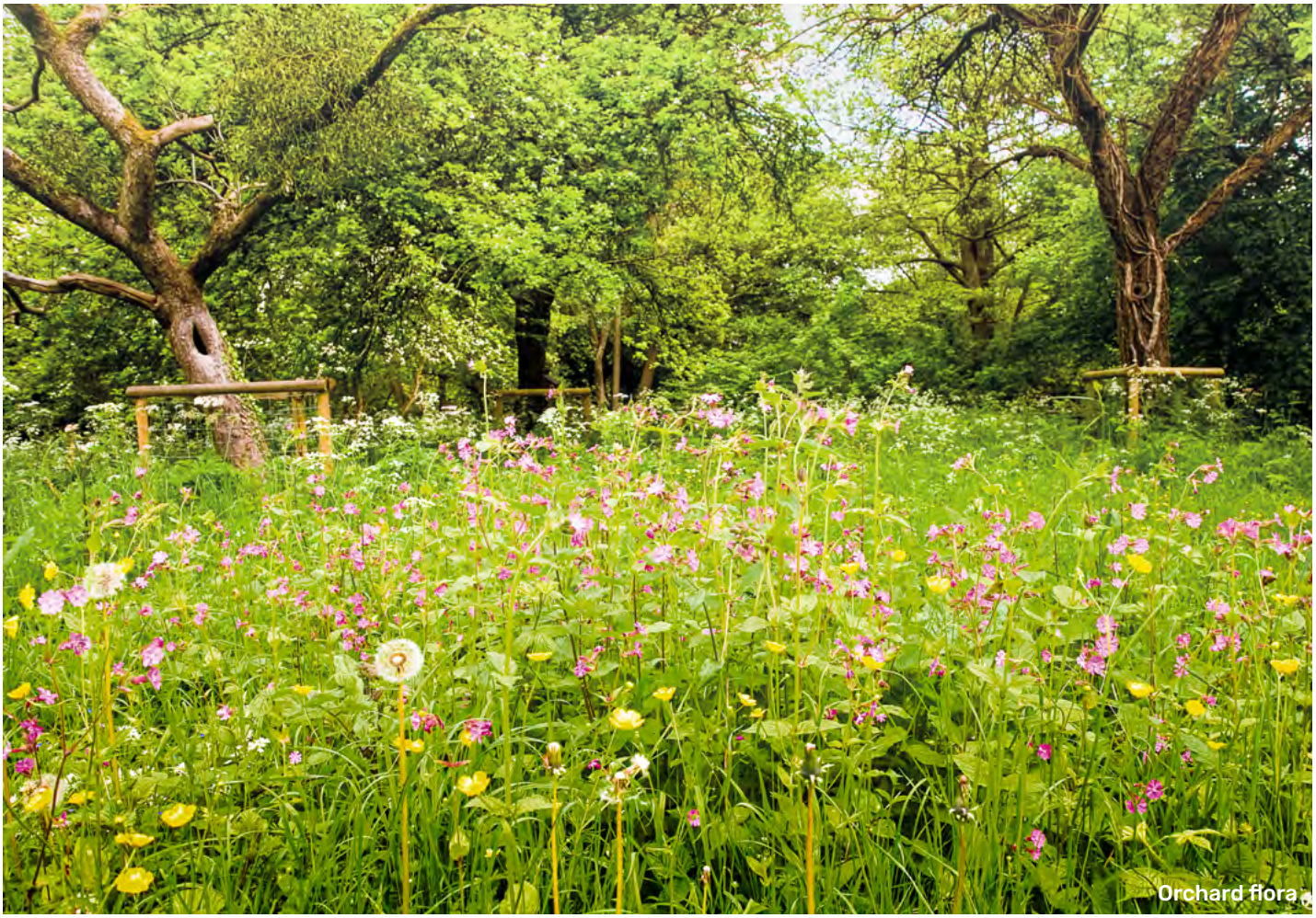
Thanks to you

We're ensuring more deadwood remains across our landscape

Eleanor Reast

Ship-timber beetle *Elateroides dermestoides*

Wendy Carter



Orchard flora

Paul Lane

If veteran trees are the skyscrapers, then our traditional orchards are a bustling metropolis for wildlife in the wider landscape, perfectly demonstrating the beauty of decay in nature.

Often overlooked, but important nonetheless, dead and dying wood is an essential part of a healthy ecosystem. It plays a vital role in woodland, where the diversity of tree structure and canopy levels from differently aged trees broaden the range of habitats available, therefore also broadening the range of species present.

While there are many species whose life-cycle is intertwined with this precious resource, it is important to remember that not all deadwood is the same. Nothing goes to waste in nature. From the 400-year-old standing dead oak tree in a hedgerow to the rotting stump overgrown by bramble at the woodland floor or to the pile of thin branches blown to the ground by a storm, it all goes back into the natural cycle.

An inordinate fondness for beetles

Our previously mentioned noble chafer, along with the very rare violet click beetle, feed on the rotting wood caused by fungal infections on veteran trees. Whilst noble chafers are associated with fruit trees, violet click beetle associate more with woodland and parkland trees. The conservation of both species, however, requires a lot of foresight and long-term planning.

Other beetles don't eat wood at all, instead feeding directly on the incredible range of fungi found on veteran trees. The cramp-ball weevil feeds directly on the King Alfred's cakes fungus, which grows on the fallen branches of ash and beech, while the ship-timber beetle *Elateroides dermestoides* burrows into oak, actively facilitating infection of the tree by the *Ambriosia* fungus that they then feed on – a fascinating example of non-human farming.

Unlike the above, stag beetles reside underground. Their larvae feed on the decaying wood and roots of tree stumps for between three and seven years, meaning they need some very big tree stumps to sustain them through their life cycle.

Furry and feathered

Shifting our focus to the feathered and fluffy, deadwood also greatly benefits our vertebrate wildlife. Arguably the cutest of the critters found in deadwood habitat are hazel dormice. They live an arboreal lifestyle, rarely crossing open ground and instead opting to move through woodland canopies searching for nuts, seeds, berries and insects. They weave intricate nests from twigs and leaf litter, often found within the natural holes in mature trees, and will use nearby cavities in the wood to cache nuts for the winter. A lot of work on the conservation of dormice has been implemented at our Monkwood nature reserve, including its recent extension of Green Farm.

Hole-nesting birds such as redstarts and flycatchers also make use of all the cracks and crevices that form on veteran trees. These birds arrive in the UK from Africa in late April and May to build their nests in preparation for the breeding season. The natural tree holes make perfect sheltered spots for them to build their nests and raise their young throughout the summer, with an abundance of food available in the form of invertebrates coming and going from the tree.

One particularly special insectivore is the rare and elusive lesser spotted woodpecker. Within the decaying wood the woodpecker can find a feast of tasty protein-rich snacks, using its specialised beak to probe into the softened wood and pick out the grubs living in it. These holes left by the woodpeckers often act as entry points into the deadwood for colonising fungi and insects, further sustaining the cycle of life and decay that is so evidently demonstrated within deadwood habitat.

Increasing deadwood on ***our*** land

Having highlighted the importance of dead and decaying wood in our landscape, and all the incredible species

Lesser spotted woodpecker

Bill Dykes

Cramp-ball fungus weevil

Wendy Carter

associated with it, how do we at the Trust conserve and augment this ecologically essential resource?

There are a variety of management techniques that our hardworking reserves team, trainees and volunteers implement every year on our sites to create more deadwood habitat; some may seem a bit harsh when seen in passing but rest assured that they are all done in benefit of our beautiful reserves and their inhabitants.

Veteranising trees is quite an impressive practice, which greatly accelerates the colonisation of mature trees by fungi and insects. It consists of making cuts in the trunk, or large limbs, of veteran trees to imitate the damage done by lightning strikes and heavy winds during thunderstorms. Piper's Hill and Dodderhill Common reserve has some brilliant examples of mature trees that have undergone veteranisation.

On the slightly more extreme side, ring barking is also a good option to create standing deadwood. This is when a cut is made all the way around the base of a tree, essentially killing it but leaving it standing. Great care is taken to select an appropriate tree, often one that has grown too thin and spindly and would need clearing anyway or a tree that is diseased and already on its way out.

A general rule we tend to abide by is 'do not tidy'. Fallen deadwood is often fine where it falls or it makes great deadwood piles or dead hedging, which is brilliant habitat for all the species mentioned so far. As a society we should try to be more tolerant of deadwood in our landscape, leaving dead tree limbs and tree stumps alone and appreciating the great service they do for the wider ecosystem.

Increasing deadwood on ***your*** land

Alongside our reserves team, our Natural Networks and Severn Treescapes projects are also doing lots of work in the wider countryside to support Worcestershire's deadwood-loving species and provide landscape scale change by increasing habitat connectivity and quality.

Both projects have been extended for another year and are open to applicants, with Treescapes taking on a bigger focus on deadwood and its prevalence in traditional orchard and wood pasture – both culturally significant habitats in Worcestershire. The Treescapes project supports landowners in implementing more trees on their land, aiming to promote farming whilst increasing biodiversity and climate resilience, shifting social perspectives to demonstrate that nature and agriculture can go hand-in-hand.

Simone Mansi, Severn Treescapes Trees and Woodland Advisor who's a professional tree-hugger, working to make a greener tomorrow.

You can help

- Don't destroy standing or fallen deadwood – leave in situ or move to a more convenient place
- Deadwood piles can be any shape and size
- Dead-hedging can provide a useful habitat if you have space and fallen timber and brash
- Mowing less frequently increases the availability of pollen and nectar sources for insects that emerge from deadwood, especially in or near orchards, wood pasture or woodland

c.650 UK beetles species rely on deadwood during their lives.

c.2,500 individual invertebrates per kg of wood mould (loose wood and debris that accumulates in hollows).*

280 individual invertebrates in one large handful of rot-hole contents.*

* Source: Woodland Trust's autumn 2019 edition of *Wood Wise: Life in Deadwood.*

Tiny **forests**

Words: **Julie Grainger**
Connor McGoldrick
Photograph: **Brian Taylor**

Our Wilder Worcestershire: Neighbourhoods Nurturing Nature project supports community-led action for nature. Whether it's a garden, shared space or park, all of our projects are powered by people.

How do urban spaces gain the benefits of woodlands, such as cleaner air, noise reduction, flood control and wildlife habitats? Recreating a woodland feel is tough in cities and towns but one solution is the Tiny Forest, planted using the Miyawaki method. We joined a growing movement (pardon the pun) to bring Tiny Forests to Worcestershire.

- Find funding. Worcestershire County Council were offered grants for Tiny Forests, leading to a great partnership.

- Find a space. Through our community work in Worcester and Droitwich, we connected with passionate groups. One primary school, one secondary school and one parish council joined the project.

- Prepare the soil. A key part of the Miyawaki method is de-compacting and enriching the topsoil to support rapid growth.

- Select the trees. Following Akira Miyawaki's approach, we chose native canopy and understory trees to mimic natural forests, even in small spaces.

- Gather volunteers. With amazing support from schools and the community, we planted hundreds of trees at a dense rate of four per square metre. Before planting, roots were dipped in mycorrhizal fungi to boost underground connections.

- Watch it grow. Trees in a Tiny Forest grow up to five times faster than traditional methods, creating nearby habitats for local wildlife and offering nature experiences close to home.

- Do real research. Schools and communities now track tree survival and growth. One school labelled trees with student's names, allowing children to measure their tree's progress each year.

- What's next? With only a few Tiny Forests in the UK, none older than five years, we're part of a living experiment. Some trees will thrive, some will wait and some will rot and become deadwood habitats, contributing to the area's biodiversity through natural processes.

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Tree planting at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Droitwich

Brian Taylor

Local **news**

Wild winners

Thank you to the 63 photographers who entered this year's photography competition. Judging keeps getting harder!

Congratulations to the winners and runners-up. Four photos went head-to-head in a public vote to choose the overall winner to feature on the front cover of our 2026 calendar. Well done to Harry Moore whose wonderful grey heron at Avon Meadows Wetland won the vote.

If you're taking photos of wildlife please remember:

- the welfare of wildlife comes first
- don't stray from paths.

Thank you to our external judges for helping make the difficult final decisions: Pete Walkden **www.petewalkden.co.uk**; Jason Curtis **www.wyrewildlife.co.uk**

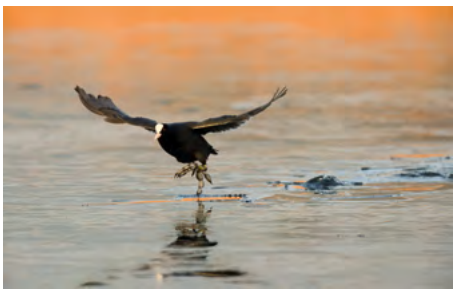
Calendars are now available to buy – see back page for details.

Winners (*left to right, top to bottom*): *Ant on a Toad* – Rebecca Jones; *Barn Owl* – Paul Lloyd; *Blackcap* – Lesley Betts; *Blue Tit in Blossom* – Chris Farman; *Brown Hairstreak* – Duncan Locke; *Bumblebee on Mexican Sunflower* – Ric Harding; *Coot* – Steve Merry; *Grey Heron* – Harry Moore; *Jackdaws Nesting* – Rob Whybrow; *Misty Valley* – Gillian Smith; *Robin and Friends* – Paul Lloyd; *Sunflower* – Anil Patel.













Thank you

Paul Meers stepped down as volunteer reserve manager for Feckenham Wylde Moor in August 2024, a role he'd done since 2009 after volunteering there since the early 1980s. Paul led a huge amount of volunteer work parties, which have been crucial in maintaining the biodiversity. On a site known especially for its dragonflies, it's Paul who has carried out much of the monitoring. Thank you to Paul for his hard work and dedication to Feckenham and to Worcestershire's wildlife; we hope he continues to enjoy visiting the reserve.

Local Groups need you

Our local groups organise walks and talks across the county and are always looking for an extra pair of hands to help out.

If you're interested in lending a few hours each month and meeting like-minded people, check out **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteering-opportunities** and search for 'local group' to find opportunities near you.

Events near **you**

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

Wednesday 23 July. **Monkwood and Green Farm** midweek ramble. Walk with SE Worcestershire Local Group.

Wednesday 6 August. **Exploring Swinyard Hill and Broad Down**. Walk with Malvern Local Group.

Wednesday 13 August. **Family nature day**. Family fun at Lower Smite Farm.

Sunday 3 August. **Walk on Hartlebury Common** with Stourbridge and Hagley Local Group

Monday 8 September. ***Pine martens*** with Johnny Birks. Talk with Bromsgrove and NE Worcs Local Group

Wednesday 10 September. ***Falcons*** with Steve Woodison. Talk with Redditch Local Group

Sunday 14 September. **Strolling in the Trimpley area** with Wyre Forest Local Group

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

Meet the team

We're looking forward to welcoming members to The Knapp and Papermill nature reserve on Tuesday 29 July between 10.00 am and 2.00 pm. Come along to meet your membership team and enjoy the beautiful nature reserve. Refreshments will be available.

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

Changed your details?

If you've changed your email address or moved house and haven't let us know, you can do so via a short form on our website **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/update-details**. Having your most up to date details means that your magazine won't go astray and we can keep you posted about the latest goings on.

Worcestershire's wetland wildlife

A very big thank you to everyone who donated as part of our spring appeal to buy land near to our Hill Court Farm nature reserve on Longdon Marsh in the south of the county. Generous donors and the Reed Foundation doubled donations to the tune of £61,024 – a great start to our appeal to help protect more of Worcestershire's wetland wildlife. We'll tell you more about this exciting opportunity in a future magazine.

Without your loyal and generous support, we could not protect and help nature to thrive in our beautiful county. Thank you.

Hill Court Farm and Longdon Marsh

Wendy Carter

Ally Tideswell and Steve Bloomfield

Welcome

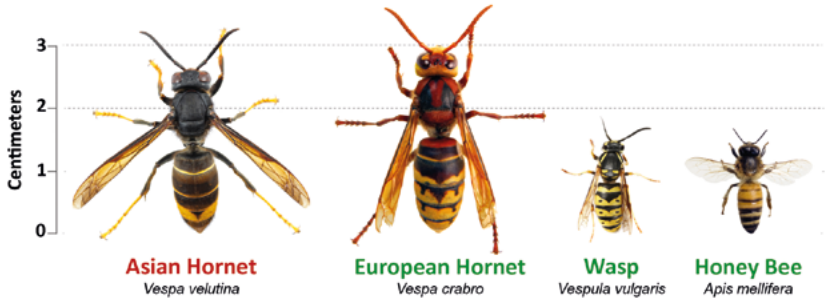
In March Ally Tideswell joined us as Head of Engagement and Fundraising. Ally has worked with charities all her career and is excited to put her fundraising and engagement experience to good use here in Worcestershire.

Congratulations to Steve Bloomfield in filling the role of Head of Conservation, following in the footsteps of Helen Woodman who retired at the end of April. Steve began his career with the Trust as a student placement in 1993.

Know your hornet

If you're not sure that you know your native from your Asian hornet, why not visit our 'know your hornet' webpage:

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/know-your-hornets to help you identify them and find out how and where to report your sightings.



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

Google play App Store

Animal & Plant Health Agency

Did you know?

Common carder bees get their name because they comb the materials to make their nests. If you see one, take a photo and let us know www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings

Common carder bee

Nick Upton/2020VISION

Online talks are back

Join us online for wildlife-themed talks every other month through autumn and winter. Starting on Wednesday 17 September, and from Green Farm to otters, these 50-minutes long talks will allow you to delve into the world of nature from the comfort of your own armchair. Visit **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on** for more information and to book.

Have your say

How do you help nature at home or what do you think our priorities should be? We'd love to hear your thoughts in our membership survey. Visit **www.surveymonkey.com/r/WWTMembershipSurvey2025**

Botany group

North Worcestershire Flora Group are a friendly group who promote and encourage the study of plants across the county. They hold monthly meetings, visiting sites (often our nature reserves) to collect and collate plant records. New members are welcome so if you're interested in getting involved, email **CescaBeamish@gmail.com** for more information.

Digital magazine

To read and subscribe to a digital magazine, visit **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/magazineJul25**

UK news

Beavers are coming home!

Female beaver

Mike Symes Devon Wildlife Trust

Earlier this year, The Wildlife Trusts celebrated the UK Government's decision to licence reintroductions of beavers into the wild in England and acknowledge free-living populations for the first time in 400 years.

The Government's decision to accept applications to return beavers into river catchments in England enables this native species to roam wild in our rivers and lakes once more.

In Wales, The Welsh Beaver Project, led by Wildlife Trusts in Wales, is currently waiting for Welsh Government's decision on the protected status of beavers following a consultation.

Currently, only 14 per cent of rivers in the UK are considered to be in good ecological condition. Beavers are natural ecosystem engineers – experts at creating healthy wetlands. Their dams retain, release and filter water as well as restore natural wetlands, rivers processes and wildlife too.

The Government recently committed to spending billions of pounds on hard infrastructure to combat flooding as well as compensating farmers for lost crops due to changing weather patterns. Releasing beavers represents a nature-based solution to many problems our rivers face and is shown to significantly reduce flood peaks.

The return of beavers has been carefully planned over a long period of time. Natural England has developed a detailed licencing regime and application process so stakeholders are engaged, landowners supported and wetlands are created to improve wildlife and the health of rivers.

To find out more information about wild beavers near you, visit **wildlifetrusts.org/beavers**

Nature is missing from Government's planning reform

The Wildlife Trusts are disappointed to see measures to boost nature's recovery largely absent from the most recent UK Government's Planning & Infrastructure Bill. Although the Bill shows some safeguards to the Nature Restoration Fund, including an 'overall improvement test', these need to be stronger.

Becky Pullinger, head of land use planning at The Wildlife Trusts, says: 'If the UK Government is serious about recovering nature alongside meeting housebuilding and other development targets, it should introduce Wildbelt designation in the bill – protection for areas of land which could be earmarked for future nature recovery – as well as a promise to protect Local Wildlife Sites.

'We have just five years to meet legal targets to halt the decline in biodiversity. We need to ensure public, private and charity investment in habitat restoration on key sites is protected for the longer term.

UK HIGHLIGHTS

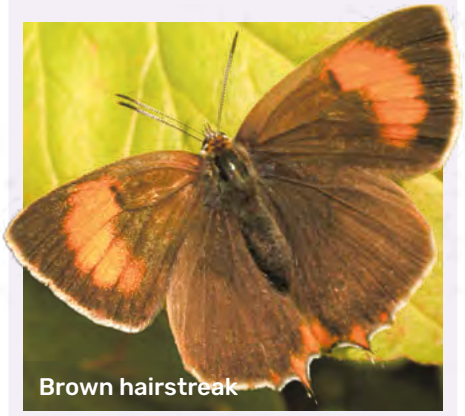
Discover how Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK

1 The art of Manx

Manx Wildlife Trust in collaboration with Visit Isle of Man announced the inaugural Biosphere Photographers in Residence for 2025. Ciara Hardisty and Adam Morgan's work will contribute to a lasting artistic legacy that highlights the Isle of Man's distinctive status as the world's only whole nation UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

2 Blistering record

The only native British species in the World's 100 Most Threatened Species list was discovered by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust at Rutland Water. The willow blister fungus (*Cryptomyces maximus*), recorded in England for only the second time since 1876, was previously only known in a few places in Pembrokeshire.



Brown hairstreak

Philip Precey

3 Rare butterfly refuge

A recent egg count of the rare brown hairstreak butterfly on the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust Asham Meads nature reserve in Oxfordshire revealed 43 eggs and a 33 per cent increase on 2022. Despite increasing threats from climate change and habitat loss, stable numbers were recorded here. **wtru.st/brown-hairstreak**

Worcestershire's nature reserves

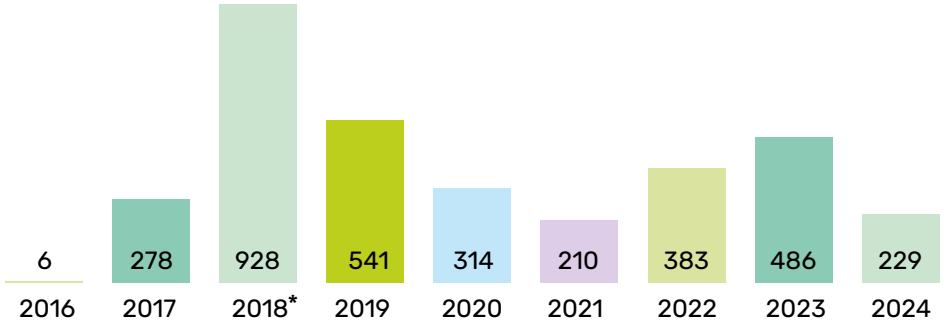
It's nice to be able to start the reserves news by saying thank you! We have reached our fundraising target to buy land at Dove Tree Farm, next to our Hanley Dingle nature reserve in the Teme Valley, which is a wonderful result for wildlife and only possible thanks to your support and that of Severn Waste Services, The Saintbury Trust, The Rowlands Trust and The Reed Foundation. We are already planning our tree planting scheme to create a diverse mosaic of grassland, woodland and scrub to expand the boundaries of Hanley Dingle, providing new habitats for wildlife and connections across the landscape as well as offsetting carbon emissions from our day-to-day activities.

It is easy to get caught up in the excitement of big new projects and we should all be proud of bringing new land into management for wildlife. The actual benefits of these projects, however, is not lines on a map but the effect upon the plants and animals that live on our reserves. So let's celebrate the birds and insects that we have been finding on our woodland reserves this summer.

Our most recent woodland creation project is at Green Farm, next to Monkwood. This year saw the highest spring count yet of wood white butterflies along the network of open grassy paths and glades, with 46 recorded in one survey. Together with Butterfly Conservation we reintroduced this locally extinct species in 2016 and changed our verge cutting management to benefit them; numbers have expanded year on year and the butterflies have spread to other woods in the county. We're also very pleased to have recorded lesser spotted woodpeckers at Monkwood. These red-listed birds have declined as a breeding bird by 41 per cent across the country in the last 40 years so their presence at Monkwood tells us that the wood is being managed well.

Loss of habitat and weather fluctuations are affecting dormice populations across the country and in good conditions we can expect around two dormice per hectare of woodland surveyed. Our surveys over the last 10 years have shown an average of two dormice per hectare but, in really good years, we've had up to 10 per hectare in our dormouse boxes. At Green Farm we've heard cuckoos calling and our newly restored hedges have been colonised by garden warblers. Wintering in the Sahara, they love the dense scrub of woodland edges and newly laid hedges to breed in, so their presence at Green Farm for the first time since our purchase is a very good sign. Garden warblers are one of the species adapting well to changes in climate and habitat in the UK and have seen their range expand by 12.6 per cent over the last 40 years.

Wood white counts from reintroduction



* Butterfly numbers fluctuate according to weather conditions; 2018 was the joint-warmest summer on record.

Paul Lane

Imperforate St John's-wort *Hypericum maculatum* at Monkwood nature reserve

HIGH FIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Carl Day

Carl Day

Tom Marshall

Wendy Carter

Wendy Carter

1. Redstart in an orchard
2. Spotted flycatcher in a churchyard
3. Brown long-eared bat on a woodland edge
4. Saw-wort in an old meadow
5. Wasp beetle in a hedgerow

Worcestershire's wetland wildlife

It isn't just our woodlands where we are expanding and seeing benefits, we've also begun fundraising for an additional 34 acres near our Hill Court Farm reserve on Longdon Marsh. This large reserve of seasonally flooded wetland is at its best in winter but has seen unusual visitors over the last year, including a spoonbill, glossy ibis and marbled duck. Adding to the land under direct conservation management in the wider Longdon Marsh area can only bring additional benefits. Please note that although there is a viewing point at Hill Court Farm, there is limited access to the whole site.

There are better viewing facilities at our Upton Warren wetland reserve, where we have just repaired the steps to the avocet hide. At the time of writing there are over 50 avocets to be seen there. Check our website for opening hours at The Flashes if you want to visit.

Essential work at The Knapp

If The Knapp and Papermill is your favourite reserve, you may be aware that the main access track has developed a large crack along its length. This has not yet become so unsafe as to limit pedestrian access but it has meant that we have been unable to use vehicles on the track, preventing us from taking hay cuts or getting grazing animals on site. Given that these are essential management tools for the meadows, we are looking to undertake significant engineering works on the track to prevent potential. Increasingly frequent and stronger winter storms have also uprooted several larger trees on the bank, their large fallen root balls further undermining the stability of the bank below the track. Should the track fall away, not only might we lose any vehicle access to the east of the reserve but it could also close the reserve to pedestrians via the main track.

Following structural engineering advice we have reluctantly decided to close the track for two to three weeks to undertake the repairs. This will require the felling of trees on the bank below the track, including several larger oaks. Whilst we do not wish to fell these trees, which will also be an expensive operation, we see no other choice unless we accept the real possibility of losing the track and the main access to this ecologically vulnerable and popular reserve. We are working with the Forestry Commission and Natural England to ensure that the work will be done as sensitively as possible. Please check our website for details of the closure.

Hard at work

If you are a regular visitors to our reserves, you may have encountered our trainee team. Every year at the start of April we recruit an eager new group of trainees looking to gain the practical skills and experience to secure their first paid job in conservation. This year we have recruited five people, bringing our current team up to six. Most of our past trainees have gone on to a job in conservation and if you'd like to learn more about the sort of things they get up to, the trainees write regular blogs that share their highs and lows. If you encounter them working on our reserves do say hello.

Our annual volunteer conference took place in early June at Lower Smite Farm. As well as updates from colleagues across the Trust, we also learnt about Natural England's beaver release trial in the Wyre Forest. What a great opportunity to take a moment to say a big thank you to our volunteers for all the work they do; if you'd like to join in, take a look at our website.

Read our trainee blogs **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/blog/conservation-trainees**

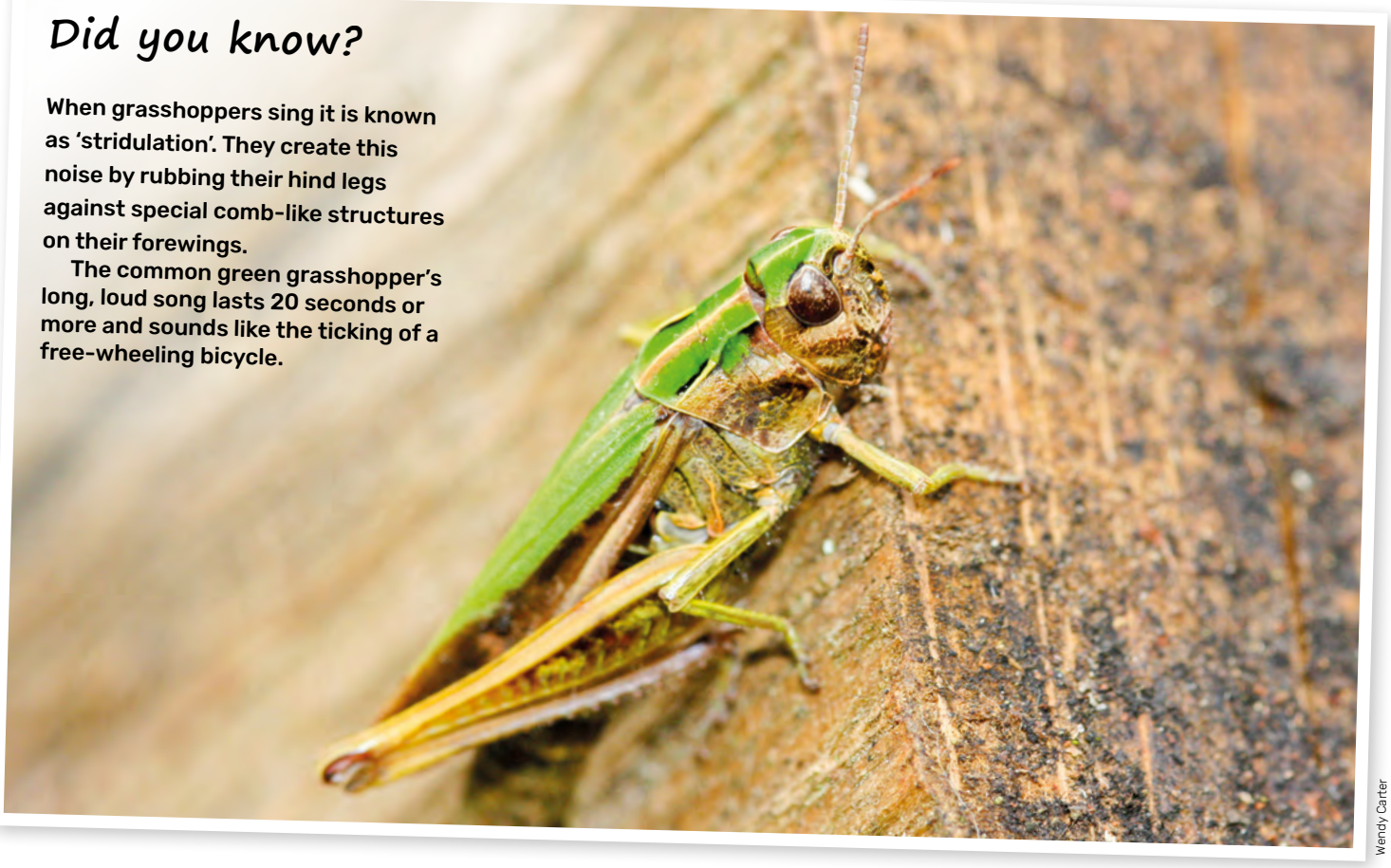
More info about volunteering **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteer**

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

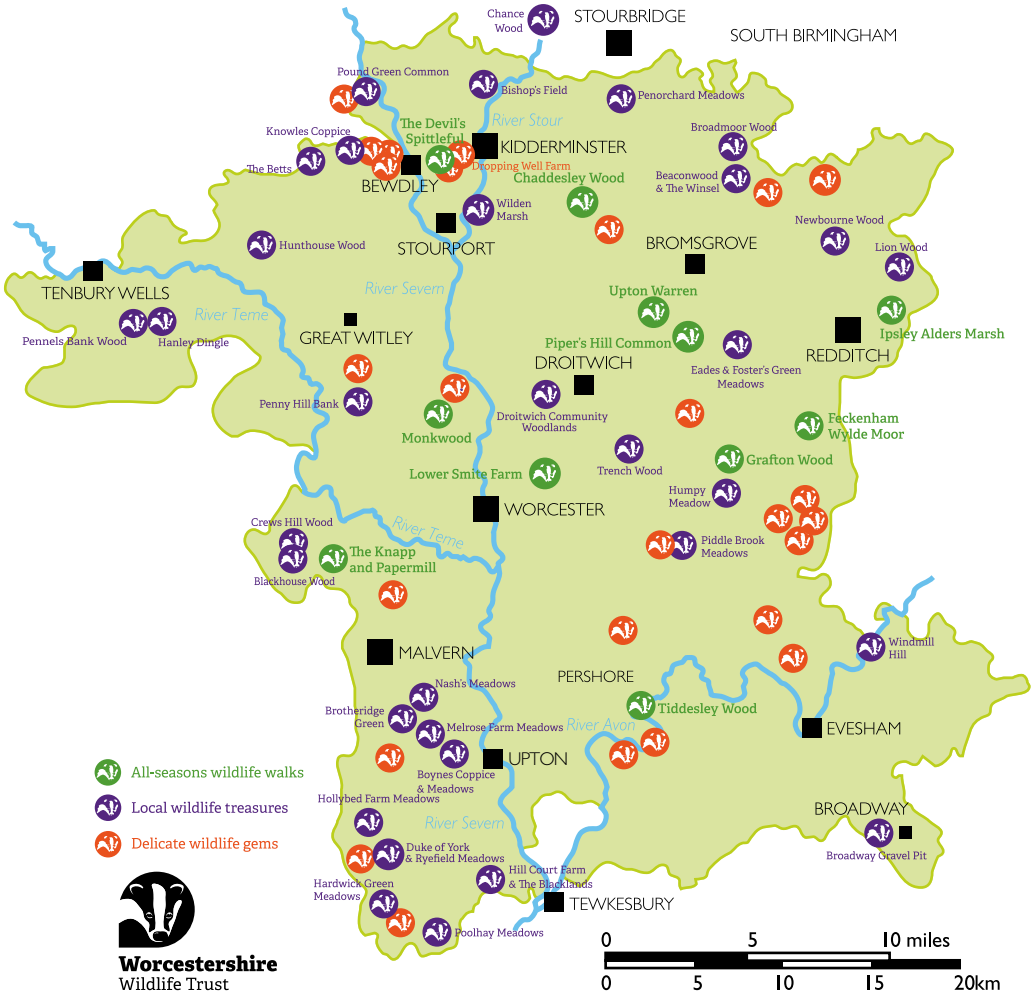
Did you know?

When grasshoppers sing it is known as 'stridulation'. They create this noise by rubbing their hind legs against special comb-like structures on their forewings.

The common green grasshopper's long, loud song lasts 20 seconds or more and sounds like the ticking of a free-wheeling bicycle.



Wendy Carter



Worcestershire's superb solitary wasps

Wendy Carter

Ornate-tailed digger wasp
Cerceris rybyensis

Think wasp, think picnic? The black and yellow wasps that haunt our foody gatherings (they're only looking for a bite to eat too) are social wasps, of which there are just nine UK species. A wonderous world opens up when you take a closer look at the 9000+ species of solitary wasps.

Female solitary wasps hunt food just for their own offspring. Just like solitary bees provision their eggs with pollen, solitary wasps provision their eggs with food too; it's just that bee larvae are vegetarians whereas wasp larvae are carnivores. From spiders to weevils, watch for solitary wasps hunting for prey. Or, just like bees, look for the cuckoos that are looking to takeover someone else's nest.

Report what you spot **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings**

Wendy Carter, WWT Communications Lead, loves insects, especially bees and wasps

Kevin McGee

Sand-tailed digger wasp *Cerceris arenaria*

Associated with north Worcestershire's sandier soils, these weevil hunters fly until late August. Females don't conceal their nests when they leave, which can lead to nests being taken over by other females. Sometimes these new owners block the entrance behind them and defend the nest when the original occupant returns; the original occupant then looks for another nest to usurp.

Kevin McGee

Cuckoo wasp *Chrysis viridula*

One of a number of similar-looking cuckoos known as ruby-tailed wasps, these are brightly coloured, heavily-armoured insects that are able to roll into a ball if caught attacking the nest of solitary wasps. Adults feed on a variety of flowers but sneak into their host's nest as the larva is about to pupate in order to lay their own egg; when it hatches it eats the host's larva. Chrysis viridula hosts are spiny-legged mason wasps.

Wendy Carter

Common spiny digger wasp *Oxybelus uniglumis*

Often associated with sandy locations (even bunkers on golf courses), these small, fast hunters are sometimes found on heavier soils in open woodlands. Nest burrows are dug into flat or sloping soil and the females hunt flies for their young. When caught, they carry their prey under their body before impaling it on their sting as they arrive at the nest. Filling a nest with prey takes about an hour and a half.

Kevin McGee

Bee wolf *Philanthus triangulum*

Once rare in Worcestershire, these large wasps are now found across the county but particularly on the heathlands in the north. If you're lucky you may spot a lek; males come together and each defends a small territory, using pheromones to attract a female to mate with. Females dig nesting burrows that can be a metre long with 34 chambers for their young, each stocked with up to six paralysed honey bees.

Kevin McGee

Spiny-legged mason wasp *Odynerus spinipes*

Occurring in a variety of habitats, the females excavate nests in vertical faces or steep slopes where they create a long entrance out of the surrounding clay (sometimes sand). The area to excavate is wetted with water and a downward curving chimney, up to 30mm long, is constructed. They stock nest cells with weevil larvae and up to 30 have been found in one cell.

Kevin McGee

Red-legged spider wasp *Episyron rufipes*

On the wing until September in Worcestershire's heathland habitats, this large wasp can be seen trying to carry paralysed orb-web spiders back to its nest cells. One of the more easily identifiable spider-hunting wasps, look for long antennae, a long body with white spots on the sides and red legs. Adults visit flowers to feed on nectar.

Wendy Carter

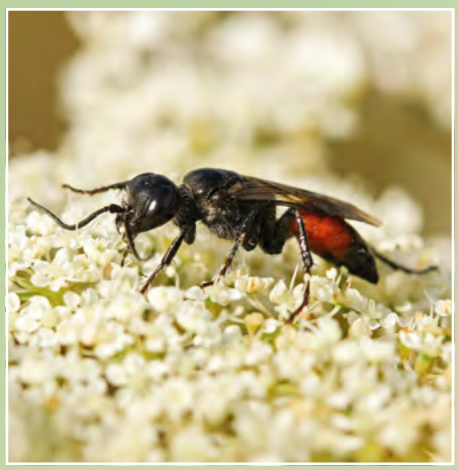
Intermediate shield wasp *Crabro peltarius*

Unusually for solitary wasps, the males are as big as the females and are the easiest of the two sexes to identify as they have a 'shield' on their forelegs. This shield is actually an enlarged tibia and its appearance differs between species. It is not known what their purpose is but it's thought that it could be related to mating behaviour. The females collect around 60 flies per nest cell.

Wendy Carter

Ridge-backed fly fox *Ectemnius cephalotes*

One of our larger wood-nesting solitary wasp species (15mm), these glossy black and yellow insects hunt flies to feed to their young. Look for them in woodland clearings, open countryside or gardens with large pieces of dead wood nearby or lots of umbellifer flowers for the adults to feed on. Females tunnel into wood to create nest chambers and can be found in large nesting aggregations



Wendy Carter

Shieldbug stalker *Astata boops*

On the wing from June to August, this small black and red wasp hunts the nymphs of shieldbugs to leave for its offspring. Their nest tunnels are short – about 10cm – but may have up to 12 cells within them. Look for males, whose eyes meet in the middle and are much larger than those of females, guarding small stones and twigs on the ground.

A **window** on the **past**

Spreading heathland seeds to ploughed sections of Dropping Well Farm to restore heathland

Andy Harris

No doubt there were times and places on our shores where there was a truly natural balance but humans have impacted landscapes and wildlife for millennia.

The existence and survival of our nature reserves reflects this long history and influence. Today, they are refuges, stepping stones and reservoirs for wildlife in an intensively managed landscape. They too, though, have been manipulated and managed by people.

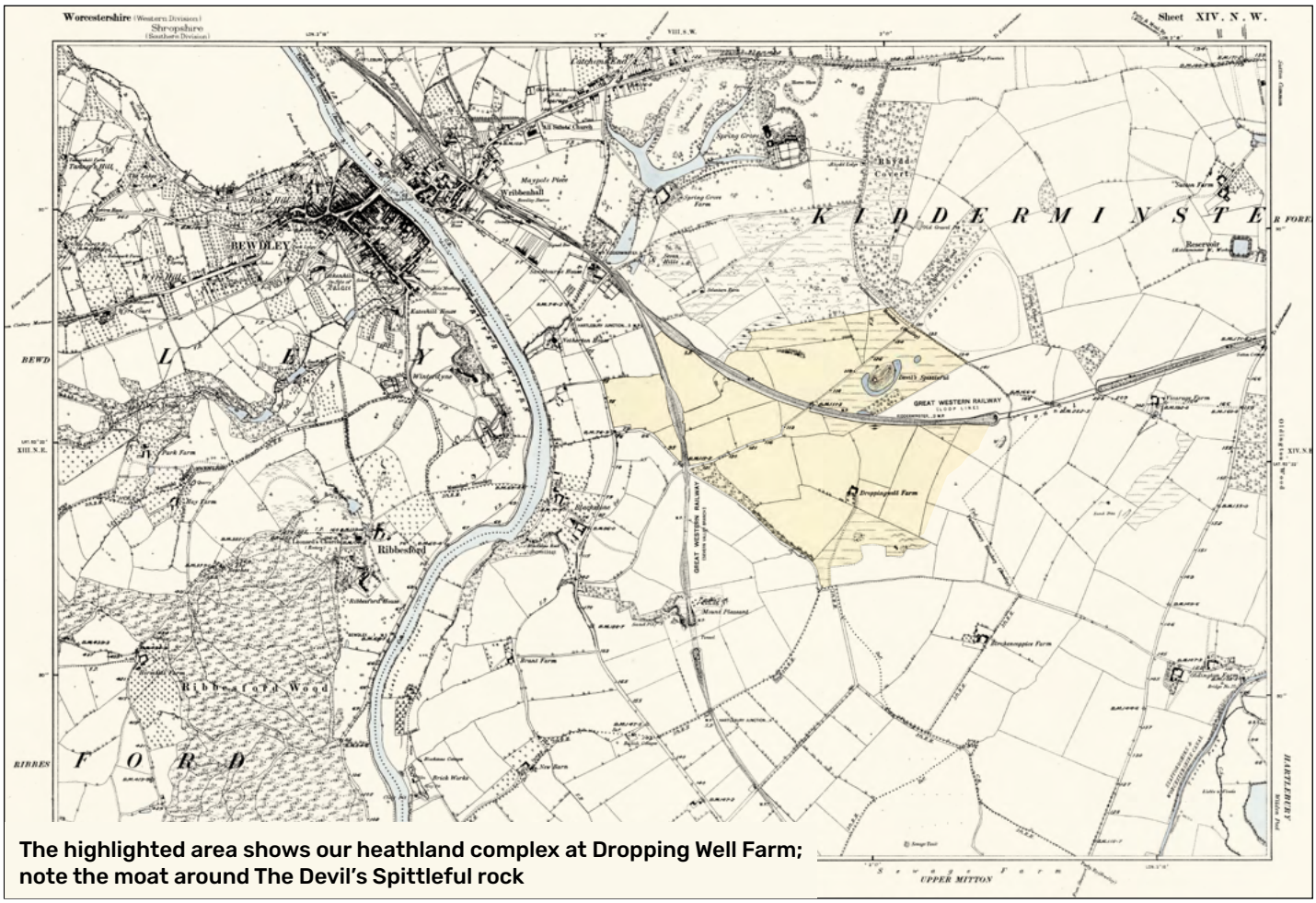
Knowing the history of our sites helps us to understand their current character, geology, hydrology, landscape, vegetation and impact of people. We can gain insights into why wildlife is present or absent. History can inform management as well as help us to form a cultural connection, engaging others to care for a place. Perhaps you're interested to hear that mammoths once fed at the pools of Upton Warren or that the Pershore yellow egg plum owes its origins to a cultivar found at Tiddesley Wood?

Mapping the features

A keen group of volunteers has been looking into the history of a number of reserves over several years and found a wealth of fascinating facts. Greatest effort has gone into The Devil's Spittleful and adjoining land. There are so many sources of information and old maps have proved very useful. For example, the 1883 OS map shows pools on what we know today as very dry heathland. Victorian publications highlight the presence of heathland plants, such as sundew, that only grow in wet peaty conditions whilst ramblers and early natural historians emphasise that the ground was marshy and home to 'waterfowl'.

This led to a major reinterpretation of the site. Although we can't yet be sure of the exact causes of the subsequent drying out, we have found documentation about extraction of groundwater for industry and drinking water to supply Stourport and Bewdley. We've also noted that the installation of locks on the River Severn in the eighteenth century would have destroyed the natural tidal system that functioned even this far from the sea. The construction of what is now the Severn Valley Railway and, more recently, the military encampment and nearby large housing estate on Burlish Top may have affected the water flow. We might not be able to reverse the impact but this information could help to prevent even more damage and there might be some mitigation that can be done on site and through partnership working, improving drainage systems, for example.

Aerial images are also invaluable and have proven that part of Dropping Well Farm was still heathland as recently as the 1980s. This helps to reassure us that we can revert the farm back to heathland as part of our Saving Worcestershire's Heathland project.



The highlighted area shows our heathland complex at Dropping Well Farm; note the moat around The Devil's Spittleful rock

A military background

The team at Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service have helped provide lots of information, including the locations of World War Two tank tracks and military trenches. The site has a long history of providing space for troops to train for war; local newspapers recorded many of the military activities as well as the establishment of the Rifle Range in 1899. On 21st May 1910, it was reported in the *Dudley Chronicle* that the 7th Territorial Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment, marched onto the site. Five-hundred-strong, the troops marched onto the ground and after pitching tents and eating, 'one portion of the troops turned out for company training, while several large parties engaged in class firing at the targets.'

After receiving training in fieldwalking and identifying artefacts lying on the surface of the land, we've found evidence from bullets of military use of the surrounding fields right up to the Second World War.

Losses mount

Prior to the eighteenth century most heaths were shared common land. The Enclosure Acts broke this traditional system and enabled individuals to privately own (and enclose) land. In parallel there were dramatic improvements to agriculture and forestry. Population growth and the industrial revolution led to the springing up and spread of many towns. A combination of these factors led to the loss of an estimated 90 per cent of heathland in the county.

At Dropping Well Farm we have found lots of material dating from after the land known as Burlish Common was enclosed. The farm itself was built around 1800 but we have numerous bits of storage container pots from the eighteenth century, axes and early farm machinery as well as oxen and shire horse shoes. Oxen were gradually replaced by horse power and by 1850 had largely disappeared from use. We've even found a gorse hook, which suggests that people were still utilising the local plants as well as growing crops. Gorse was encouraged to grow amongst crops as it fed the soil with nitrogen and provided an invaluable crop itself after the cereals were harvested. The freshly coppiced growth is tender and was used to feed the horses that everyone depended upon.

Undoubtedly, the growing demand for rearing ever more sheep led to the demise of the wolf; Edward I commissioned Peter Corbet in 1281 to destroy all the wolves he could find in the counties of Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, Shropshire and Staffordshire. The Enclosure Acts of later centuries, however, were most likely the cause of the loss of wildlife like great bustards and black grouse that relied on open landscapes.

A wildlife-rich future?

The fact that The Devil's Spittleful and Rifle Range survived at all is remarkable. It was used for rough grazing until the 1950s and its military use probably kept it going. Today, it is a window onto a past landscape that once stretched across vast tracts of Worcestershire, from the well-drained and high grounds along the Severn valley, wrapping around Birmingham and on down to the Malverns.

We might not see wolves return to Worcestershire but if we can restore large tracts of undisturbed heath then many animals such as meadow pipits, tree pipits, woodlarks and nightjars could breed again. It is not inconceivable to imagine a world where, if there is enough space, black grouse and even bustards could return.

Andy Harris, WWT Northern Reserves Officer likes to understand how humans have influenced and interact with the natural world.

severn waste services

Made possible with Heritage Fund

A practical perspective

Throughout each volunteering session, Andy has provided a clear view of how we are helping return these areas to low lying heathland and giving nature a boost to re-establish absent species of flora and fauna.

Naturally, it is useful to understand how the land has been used throughout history and so I offered to help study this. For me, that meant searching old newspapers and maps, both online and at The Hive, as well as undertaking a metal survey of the fields at Dropping Well Farm. To date, I have found dateable material covering the last 230 years and demonstrated the dramatic variation in the number of 'iron bits' field to field; indicative of the varying degree and type of human activity.

For wider volunteer engagement, Andy arranged field walking and ceramic identification sessions with Worcester Archaeology and Archive Service, which were fascinating. And, yes! These paid off – during January this year I found a 5,000-year-old Neolithic knapped flint knife on site. Amazing!

At sunset, looking across the fields to the Spittleful, the biggest flock of goldfinches ever flies overhead, a deer scuttles into our newly laid hedgerow and the ancient flint nestles in my hand; what an absolutely magical place! Thank you WWT.

David Brown, practical conservation volunteer at The Devil's Spittleful and Dropping Well Farm.

Field walking

Andy Harris

Neolithic knapped flint knife

David Brown

People have always manipulated heathland – our volunteers continue to do so

Wendy Carter

Seasonal **pickings**

Like so much of our wildlife, the UK's butterfly populations are known to be in long-term decline.

Habitat loss is a major contributor to this decline both for butterflies that need specific foodplants or habitats as well as those found in the wider landscape, including those you might spot in your garden. Butterfly numbers also experience annual fluctuations related to our unpredictable weather, as the drought of 2022 and the wet start to last year demonstrated once survey data was analysed.

It isn't just those with a passion for wildlife that are aware of the declines. I heard 'where have all the butterflies gone?' regularly last spring. Touching wood as I write, this spring seems to have started more encouragingly.

Some of this awareness is driven by a different reason to the one that worries conservationists. Without minimising the seriousness of the scientific evidence, there is an annual natural phenomenon that may influence public perception of low butterfly numbers; because of the period that it occurs, it has become known to butterfly surveyors as the 'June gap'.

The classic early spring species, which can still be seen throughout summer and into autumn (think brimstones, peacocks, commas, small and large whites), emerge, breed and lay eggs. Their numbers, which may not have been the highest at this time, then wane. Quite naturally there is a gap between the disappearance of much of this first generation and the emergence of the year's second generation of adults.

The noticeable effect of all the butterflies seemingly vanishing is further enhanced because it also precedes the emergence of the adult 'summer' butterflies – white admirals, marbled whites, silver-washed fritillaries and the 'orange' skippers (large, small and Essex) and purple emperors to name a few.

The butterfly-rich days of July are usually such a contrast to those in June that it is understandable that there is a perception that the earlier part of the year has been butterfly poor. Unlike the June 'nectar' gap, which is a shortage of food for many invertebrates at this period, the June 'butterfly' gap is purely a result of life-cycle timings.

Cast your mind back a month or so – if June appeared devoid of butterflies, July and the following months are worth looking forward to as they see the highest number of species on the wing and they include some of our most spectacular and sought after butterflies. Happy butterfly spotting!

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

Top tip

A slow stroll, with plenty of pauses, along a woodland path is a great way to spot and observe butterflies and other invertebrates.

Peacock and comma butterflies

Paul R. Lloyd

Beetlemania

Bloody-nosed beetle

Vaughn Matthews

I'd been here before and left disappointed. How could I hope to spot one little beetle in a forest of foliage?

Like so many wild encounters, it came down to timing, research and a little bit of luck. I knew I was in the right place – patrolling a patch of grass, shrubs and saplings beneath towering birch trees. I knew it was the right season, with the late spring sun warming the morning.

There she was, a splash of red amongst the green. Hunkered on a leaf, soaking in the sunlight, warming up for her maiden flight. A female hazel pot beetle. She was almost cartoonishly oblong, a caricature of a beetle with her black head tucked beneath her bright red body. I'm not sure if it was her shape, her colour or her rarity that enchanted me but that encounter will live long in my memory.

I've enjoyed similarly magical moments with many more beetles, from dazzling jewel beetles to cliff tiger beetles racing across rocks. The sheer number and variety of beetles in the UK is staggering – there are more than 4,000 of them. Wherever you look, however long you search, there will always be a new beetle to discover. They're even more diverse than The Beatles' back catalogue and, I think, should be just as celebrated. It's time for a new Beetlemania!

Ladybird Madonna

If the nation had a favourite beetle, it would probably be a ladybird. They're familiar, brightly coloured

7-spot ladybird

Jon Hawkins, Surrey Hills Photography

and considered the gardener's friend thanks to their appetite for aphids. When you picture a ladybird, it's likely the 7-spot, with seven black dots decorating its bright red back. But did you know there are almost 50 species to discover in the UK?

Many of them share a similar style, pairing red and black. Others can be orange or yellow. These bright colours are a warning. They let potential predators know that this meal would leave a bad taste in the mouth. This is known as aposematic colouration. Studies have shown that brighter ladybirds tend to be more toxic, with birds less likely to attack the brighter species as a result.

The largest ladybird is the eyed ladybird, reaching a (relatively) impressive length of 8.5 mm. It's a conifer specialist, best looked for on the branches of Scots pine. Whilst many ladybirds are found in trees, there are plenty to be discovered closer to the ground. The 14-spot ladybird stalks aphids across nettles and other low-growing plants. It's a beautiful, bright yellow beetle with rectangular black spots that often fuse together.

Not all ladybirds are large and brightly coloured. Almost half of our resident species are considered inconspicuous ladybirds. They're small, subtly marked and much more difficult to find. The aptly named dot ladybird can be as little as 1.3 mm. It's a black speck often found on fruit trees, where it hunts spider mites – helping to control their numbers.


Thick-legged flower beetle

Alan Price


Oak jewel beetle


Bee chafer

Vaughn Matthews


Mint beetle

Amy Lewis

Let it bee

Imitation is the greatest form of flattery but it can also be an excellent survival strategy. Lots of defenceless insects have evolved to look like bees and wasps to fool predators. This is known as Batesian mimicry and there are some brilliant beetles getting in on the act.

One of my favourites is the bee chafer *Trichius fasciatus*. It has black bands across its yellow wing cases, bringing to mind a bee's bum. The effect is enhanced by a fuzzy ginger back and a habit of trundling across flowers. But as any good cover band knows, it's not enough to look like your idol, you have to sound like them too. Bee chafers buzz as they fly from flower to flower. Sadly, you're unlikely to see one away from Wales or the Highlands of Scotland.

Luckily, there's another mimic found a lot more widely. Wasp beetles live in woodlands across most of Britain. Yellow bands across their black bodies give the impression of a wasp. The beetles add to this effect by moving in a jerky, wasp-like manner. You can often find wasp beetles resting openly on leaves or fences, trusting their colours to keep them safe.

Hey jewel

How do you take a beetle and make it better? You make it shiny! From shining stripes to metallic sheens, there are some gloriously glossy beetles in the UK.

Jewel beetles live up to their name, with some species shimmering emerald or bronze. But, like true precious gems, they're hard to come by. Their larvae leave characteristic D-shaped holes in the trunks of trees but it takes a lot of luck to spot an adult. Fortunately, there are plenty of shining beetles that are far more easily found.

For example, rose chafers. These big beetles are hard to miss, visiting flowers on a sunny day. They're a gorgeous, metallic golden-green, their colours shifting as the sun catches them. Like many beetles, they are pollinators, fulfilling the same important role as bees and butterflies. Rose chafers are found throughout southern Britain, sometimes visiting gardens.

Another glittering garden visitor is the rosemary beetle. Its metallic green back is embellished with striking purple stripes. It's a recent arrival to the UK but has quickly spread. These beetles are easily found on rosemary and other aromatic plants. They are leaf

Acorn weevil

Frank Porch

beetles and share the genus *Chrysolina* with many equally attractive species, including the mint leaf beetle and dead-nettle leaf beetle.

Twist and snout

Let's shake it up from the bright and bold and explore some of our more bizarre beetles. When it comes to looks, weevils have the best nose in the business – though technically it's a rostrum with their mouthparts at the end. This long 'snout' gives them a comical appearance, which is only enhanced by their large and often prominent eyes.

One of the longest snouts belongs to the acorn weevil. Females use theirs to bore into an acorn, allowing them to lay an egg inside. The young weevil grows inside the acorn, eventually burrowing out to pupate in the soil. Not all weevils have such a long snout. The scarce fungus weevil's rostrum is broad and flattened. If feeds on the fungi known as King Alfred's cakes, its mottled pattern providing the perfect camouflage.

Whether they're strangely shaped, shiny, brightly coloured or masterful mimics, beetles are brilliant. They are pollinators, predators and recyclers, carrying out the vital tasks that help keep wild places balanced. Let's come together and celebrate these incredible insects.

Tom Hibbert is a naturalist and content officer for The Wildlife Trusts. He's currently on a quest to track down all of the UK's tiger beetles.

Beetlemania in Worcestershire

What's a beetle?

As Tom has written, beetles come in all sorts of shapes and sizes but a unifying feature is the hardened wing cases (elytra) that protect the delicate wings underneath. Beetles also have biting mouthparts, although these aren't usually easy to spot, and their lifecycle follows a complete metamorphosis of egg, larva, pupa, adult.

What might I see in Worcestershire?

From the jewel-like noble chafers *(see page 4)* to the giant stag beetles (*see front cover*), Worcestershire has its fair share of these amazing insects. Why not visit our website to see what else you might be able to spot: **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/brilliant-beetles**

How can I help beetles?

Beetles are brilliant insects for your garden and greenspaces. They feed on a range of invertebrates you might not be so keen on and are natural recyclers of nutrients. From log piles to flowers, there are a range of ways you can attract and help beetles on your patch. Take a look at our wild about beetles webpage and download your free booklet that's packed with inspiration **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wild-about-beetles**

Wasp beetle

Gail Hampshire

Wild **notebook**

Mustn't forget

Five things to photograph:

- a circular hole in a rose leaf made by a leaf-cutter bee
- a dung beetle attracted to a pile of dung
- several different insects around a bee hotel
- a plant growing out of a wall
- a bracket fungus on a tree trunk showing shed spores

Five things to do:

- Use a bat detector to locate and listen to grasshoppers and crickets
- Look for galls developing on the underside of oak leaves
- Find an aphid colony and watch for insects coming to feed on the honeydew
- Visit a pond and look for whirligig beetles spinning on the water surface
- Look closely and compare a variety of seedpods on garden plants

Photographs by Rosemary Winnall

Salmon salad fungus
Guepinia helvelloides

Sometimes called apricot jelly, this flexible gelatinous, rubbery, ear-shaped fungus may be found in late summer or autumn either as solitary ears or in tufts. It appears to be growing out of the soil but is usually associated with buried rotting wood and can grow up to 10cm tall. After drying out, it can regain its shape when rehydrated, producing a new crop of white spores each time.

Birch leaf-roller weevil
Deporaus betulae

The black female weevil cuts most of the way through a birch leaf before rolling it and laying one egg inside. Although green at first the cone later turns brown, which makes the rolls conspicuous in late summer. Similar cones may be found on hazel made by bright red hazel leaf-rolling weevils.

Yellow meadow ants *Lasius flavus*

These ants are extremely common but not often seen as they live underground. When the winged males and females emerge, the yellow workers accompany them to the nest surface and in this photo you can see the very large black queen, smaller black males and yellow workers observed on 3rd August.

Little black puddings
Dasineura pteridis

These black, cigar-shaped galls are produced on bracken in the autumn in response to eggs laid by this gall midge. There is a single orange-yellow larva in each pudding. These overwinter in the soil and adults fly in the spring, although the galls are more easily found than the adults.

River limpet *Ancylus fluviatilis*

These 8mm snails may be found in oxygen-rich fast-flowing water. Like their marine relatives and lake limpets, they live on rocks where they graze on algae. They are sensitive to pollution but can recolonise when the river recovers. They have been around for over two million years!

Little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Sometimes known as dabchicks, these small dumpy birds with their fluffy backends, are found in open water on lakes, rivers and canals. They're our smallest grebe and their trilling call sounds like a horse whinnying. They have large webbed feet and dive readily to feed on fish and invertebrates.

Pebble prominent caterpillar
Notodonta ziczac

Adult moths fly between May and August and lay their eggs on sallow, aspen or poplar. There are two broods, so the impressive caterpillars are found during June to July and again in August to late September before they pupate in the ground. They feed with their tails in the air.

Guelder rose berries
Viburnum opulus

Guelder rose bushes grow in damp areas and their berries slowly turn red as autumn progresses. They are usually left on the trees until late winter when they provide a vital food supply, especially in cold conditions. They are eaten by blackbirds, thrushes, bullfinches and waxwings.

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.

Time well spent

Paul Lane

Laid hedge at Green Farm

The purchase of land at Green Farm was made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Severn Waste Services, the Banister Charitable Trust, 3dtotal.com Ltd, the LG Harris Charitable Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and generous donations from Trust members and supporters.

On an early spring morning in April 2019, I first looked across the gently rolling fields of Green Farm. As our managers and trustees discussed the mechanics of acquiring the land, the blank canvas before me was exploding into possibilities that were bursting with life in my mind's eye.

I was two years into my job as a reserves officer and surely not qualified or knowledgeable enough to make my vision a reality? But anyone can have a vision and with the determination to see it through, support from others and always having an eye on the end goal, anyone can achieve that vision.

Brimming with inspiration and creativity, I was very quickly brought back down to earth when I realised that not only had I never done anything like this before, the Trust hadn't either. The wider conservation movement was just starting to focus on rewilding in a big way and many of those ideas and theories struck me as a perfectly logical way of going about land restoration. Seeing the ecosystem as a whole, deep diving into the symbiosis between species, habitats and the elements and returning to the way that nature manages the landscape is surely just common sense.

To me, rewilding isn't about returning lost species but truly understanding the natural way of things. It can be done anywhere, at any scale and all we need to do is give nature a little nudge to get started.

A glimpse of the past

So began four years of getting to know Green Farm. I pored over old maps of the area, read all sorts of reports about Green Farm from experts in natural history and archaeology and I was fascinated when listening to local historians. Through this process, I came

A sea of lady's smock, spring 2025

Dom Cragg

Hedge planting

James McDonald

Mike Ashton, MA Creative

to understand that Green Farm was once part of an ancient woodland that enveloped Worcestershire after the last ice age. Since then, the land has been used for cultivation, grazing, wood pasture, fruit growing and hay meadows. Despite all these changes, woodland species are still there.

Nestled at the base of old hedgerows are bluebells, wild garlic and cowslips. In those hedgerows and occasional woodland copses, trees like oak, small-leaved lime and field maple rub shoulders with willow, blackthorn, spindle and wild service. The potential for woodland specialists to expand from Monkwood was a real bonus – what better way of restoring woodland when you have a rich, complex ancient woodland right next door!

Monkwood could become the beating heart of the area, from which species gradually colonise Green Farm and beyond.

A vision of the future

Turning Green Farm to woodland was now the aim . . . but just woodland? A really biodiverse landscape is one where there are lots of different habitats. It's very simple really; the more habitats there are, the more opportunities for different forms of life – opportunities for food, opportunities for shelter and opportunities to breed successfully. In a woodland, you might find 2,000 different species. In a mixed landscape of woodland, thorny scrub, pools and flowering meadows, there could be so many more. Since we had 60 acres to play with, a bit of everything became our goal.

In January 2023, we began to restore the land for wildlife. Some of those actions were pretty quick and easy, such as leaving areas of long grass simply by not cutting it, laying hedges rather than flailing and swapping cows for sheep. Other parts of our restoration programme will take centuries to develop!

With the help of our wonderful volunteers, young people and local community groups, we've planted over 5,000 trees, removed fences, introduced deadwood into the landscape and started to monitor the impact that the changing landscape is having on wildlife. We've marvelled at veteran oak trees, been mesmerised by fox cubs playing in the meadow, celebrated new bird species and been dazzled by butterflies. We've tucked in new roots with hope, watched tiny hawthorn saplings start to naturally spread out from their parent plants and smiled as the first cuckoos return to serenade us with the sounds of spring.

More to come

A lot has happened since I first saw Green Farm but this is just the start. Next, we hope to turn our attention to water and improve ponds, dig new ponds where they've been lost from the landscape and reconnect ditches into Monkwood. Ultimately, nature will take hold now that humanity has released its grip and it's exciting to think where that might lead. We won't be around to see the end but to have played a small part is enough for me. As Tolkein's Gandalf once said, 'All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us' and I think my time over the last six years has been spent rather well!

Dom Cragg, WWT Western Reserves Officer is determined to see a wilder Worcestershire

Find out more: **www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/blog/monkwood-musings**

The magical kingdom

Zoe Claymore, the award-winning garden designer behind The Wildlife Trusts' British Rainforest Garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, connects us to moisture loving plants in our gardens from our Celtic past.

Temperate rainforests, which once covered a fifth of the UK but now cover less than one per cent, contain one of the oldest plants in the kingdom – moss. These prehistoric plants have been around since before the dinosaurs. They are phenomenal and need their moment to shine. So why not give your garden the temperate woodland makeover with mosses, ferns and lichens.

You may already have moss in your garden in the damp, shady environments. These mossy habitats are sacred and need time to be left alone to grow. Sadly, often people don't see moss as a plant in the garden, they see it as a problem that needs to be scraped off. We absolutely have to stand up for these ancient mossy places or they will be lost.

Moss is an essential part of any garden ecosystem where fungi grows and a host of small creatures find shelter and food. Beetles, slugs and snails to tiny springtails and microscopic creatures attract birds and other animals higher up the food chain.

I spent my childhood playing on mossy boulders over the River Lyd, in a temperate woodland in Lydford Gorge out the back of my grandparents' house. I firmly believe moss is a great addition to any garden: when I feel the soft, velvety cushion under foot or in my hands, I still have that childlike sense of wonder.

In my British rainforest garden, I use a leaning silver birch tree and hazel tree to create a British rainforest vibe, whilst water trickles over natural stone boulders to evoke the sounds of the forest. Garden-friendly adaptations include an accessible wooden walkway through the wonderland, and a living wall covered in ivy, ferns, woodland flowers – and moss, of course!

The British Rainforest Garden at RHS Chelsea Flower Show was made possible with generous sponsorship from Project Giving Back and our British Rainforest partner Aviva. The garden will be relocated to Bristol Zoo after the show.

# of moss

Hannah Bailey

1. Foxglove The charismatic, tall pink foxglove flowers are a reminder of the hazy days of summer buzzing with bumblebees and moths.

2. Ferns Have fun with ferns and throw them some shade in the garden so those lush, curly fronds can thrive. This is the purple royal fern.

3. Hazel Hazel trees are good in the city for smaller gardens, great for wildlife and can be coppiced to use as stakes in the garden.

4. *Hypnum cupressiforme* moss This is great moss for lawns and very ecologically adaptable.

5. Black spot lichen Lichens are epiphytes or 'air plants' that survive on nutrients and moisture in the air. They are made of fungus and algae, 'rock up' on trees and take time to grow.

6. Dicranum scoparium moss This gorgeous moss is great for adding patches to the lawn. It's amazing under foot, so soft and spongy and easy to maintain.

7. Silver birch Silver birch trees often don't grow straight in these habitats, so to celebrate nature's resilience, I've included a leaning tree. Embrace the imperfect, don't get rid of it.

8. Oak moss lichen Lichen takes time to grow on the bark of a tree, thriving on sunlight and moisture. There are many different types of lichen that spread slowly with wonderful names from oak moss to shaggy strap and handwriting lichen.

Zoe Claymore is an award-winning landscape and garden designer based in southwest London. In 2023 she won RHS Gold, People's Choice and Best 'Get Started' Garden at Hampton Court for her design of The Wildlife Trusts' Renters' Retreat.

The bit-by-bit **encroachment** on our **neighbourhoods**

Humanity's demands today for nature's goods and services far exceed her ability to meet them on a sustainable basis. We need 1.7 Earths to maintain the world's current living standards, and that's a conservative estimate. But we would not know that by studying the measure most widely used to judge economic success: Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

That's because GDP does not consider the depreciation of assets, such as wetlands, mangroves, coral reefs, grasslands and forests, that accompany our production and consumption activities. An economy could be enjoying GDP growth for a long while even as the basis on which we produce and consume degrades and shrinks.

The human overreach is reflected in the rate at which species are becoming extinct, currently at some 100–1,000 times the rate of extinction over the past several million years. But when we think of human-induced species extinction, large-scale changes in land use come to mind.

We tend to think of forests being transformed into land for crops, animal farms and plantations; of grasslands transformed into pastures; and of mines and quarries ripping apart dense jungles. But there is a more insidious process at work, which is perhaps as powerful: the bit-by-bit fragmentation of ecosystems that accompanies GDP growth.

Persistent, incremental encroachment into nature is insidious because each move seems near harmless: a new bus lane cutting through an ancient orchard here, a mangrove forest sliced to make way for a luxury hotel there, a bat habitat destroyed to make room for additional housing in an urban sprawl elsewhere. The problem is, the orchard will not return, the mangrove forest won't have space to recover its previous glory and the bat population will die because it has nowhere to go.

If at each move human demand is allowed to trump ecological integrity, the landscape that evolves becomes denuded of wildlife. It is there that we each can play a role by minding our own neighbourhood. Unlike global climate change, over which no group on its own can have a marked effect, biodiversity can be protected by communitarian endeavours. Our Wildlife Trusts play an enormous role in protecting and preserving local wildlife.

Projects like the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire's acquisition and preservation of Strawberry Hill, a rewilded farm in Bedfordshire, are helping to expand space for wildlife in some of the most nature-depleted areas of the UK. And on a different scale, the same Trust, of which I'm proud to be President, is working with young people in Luton to plant hedgerows in local parks that connect woodlands and other habitats together. This allows wildlife to thrive in the most urban of environments and simultaneously ensures that the local residents are connected to the wildlife that shares their neighbourhood, too. Wildlife Trusts all over the country have similar projects and together we are making a difference.

In conversation

The Wildlife Trusts' Chief Executive, Craig Bennett, met Professor Dasgupta to discuss the findings of the globally respected review on *The Economics of Biodiversity*. You can catch up on the recording of our WildLIVE on The Wildlife Trusts' YouTube channel by visiting **wtru.st/Economics-of-Biodiversity**

Sir Partha Dasgupta is an environmental economist and professor at Cambridge University, author of a groundbreaking report on protecting global nature and president of the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.

Hannah Bailey

Your letters

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

Humble Bumble

Inspired by your feature on red-tailed bumblebees in the spring magazine, I wrote the following:

A silent time in the garden
Is all I need to relax during the daylight hours
When I can listen to the wonderful wildlife
Then I pick up the scents of the flowers

I sniff the air and feel it clearing my head
Blowing around in the summer breeze
With the sunlight shining I close my eyes
To hear the gentle humming of bees.

I look to see the queen collecting nectar
To feed her larvae in a hole nearby
Before returning to feed on the flowers
It was a such joy to watch her fly.

Buzzing in the sunlight above my head
before returning to her home in the flower bed.

Tim Stavert

Spring bluebells

This is about immersing yourself in nature and letting your imagination run wild:

I set sail on a honey scented sea of blue and found a secret place, I wait. Here they come uprooted, grabbing me by the hand to sing and dance with a band of fiddleheads. The oak disapproves the beech rejoices, suddenly I'm scolded by the wren and I'm back where I started.

Paul Lane

Robert Pugh

Smiling face?

I don't know whether David Dyer picked up his pale tussock moth caterpillar [spring letters page] but if he did he would have seen this happy chappy smiling back at him!

Bob Pugh

Ed: *Please be aware that the hairs of many species of caterpillar can be an irritant.*

Jenny Jarvis

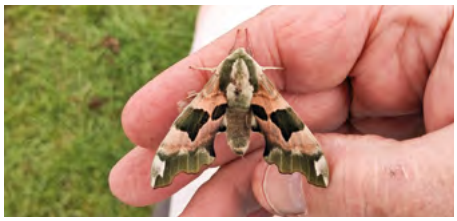
Survey delight

I want to say how delighted Mike and I were with our first butterfly survey and visit to Wilden Marsh.

We saw herons and a buzzard but only two types of butterfly – peacocks and orange-tips – but that didn't matter as Mervyn shared his knowledge of spring flowers. We got followed by some good looking cows!

Jenny Jarvis

Ed: *We're delighted you enjoyed the survey. Visitors should note that there is no access to most of the reserve during breeding season.*



Paul Dumnall

Lime hawk-moth

Here is my friend the lime hawk-moth in my garden today.

Paul Dumnall

Apologies

The hair ice photo in your spring magazine was sent in by Mike Billingham, not Mark.

We let you down in our last issue by forgetting to caption some photos with the names of the species. We hope we've done better this time!

Social feeds

My 500th post . . . this was my first time admiring and capturing a barn owl in the wild.

Incredibly delighted after many years into my photography journey to finally get one on camera and make this my special 500th Instagram post.

@ap_freedomphotography

Anil Patel

Anstice Hughes

First speckled wood #butterfly in the garden this year.

Plus a pair of orange tips and some holly blues. Too quick for me to photograph!

@ansticem.bsky.social

KEEP IN TOUCH

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CHRISTMAS CARDS £4 PER PACK (10 CARDS) OR 3 PACKS FOR £10

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Looking for the perfect gift for the nature lover in your life? Why not consider one of our virtual gifts. You could rent a nest box, adopt a species or purchase one of our virtual gift cards to give your loved one a unique and meaningful gift. Whether you adopt an otter, rent a nest box at one of four woodlands, or send a virtual Carpet of Bluebells, your purchase will go directly into conserving the habitats of Worcestershire's precious wildlife.

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