

Worcestershire **WILDLIFE**



Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust

Protecting wildlife where we live

December 2025, Issue No. 164



Welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of the Trust's magazine for supporters. In this edition we get to celebrate the Trust's army of volunteers that make our work possible through the stories of Nigel, Joan, Maggie and Viv. Thank you to all our volunteers for the immense contribution you all make.

Around four in every five Trust volunteers support our practical conservation efforts on our nature reserves across the county. On this front, since the last magazine we have acquired the land to extend our Hanley Dingle nature reserve near Tenbury, started and finished fundraising for a new area of land on Longdon Marsh in the south of the county and begun fundraising to double the size of our brilliant Trench Wood nature reserve. The efforts to extend Trench Wood is part of a huge landscape-scale project in the east of the county that we will explain more about in the spring magazine.

Our work sits within a range of actions needed to halt nature's decline. This includes the amazing things you all do where you live, work and study. Nature hasn't had the greatest public policy support in recent years despite widespread support from the public. All of us play an important role in standing up for nature. At the Trust we have been working tirelessly to challenge policies like the Planning and Infrastructure Bill that threatens both species and habitat protections. Thank you to everyone who wrote to their MP to make their views known.



Mike Perry
Chief Executive Officer



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Our wild volunteers

Brian Taylor



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Bird's of a feather

Wendy Carter

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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Chair: Christianne Tipping
Vice Chair: Tom Meikle
Treasurer: John Blakiston
Secretary: Bob Gillmor
Chief Executive Officer: Mike Perry
Head of Conservation: Steve Bloomfield
Head of Resources: Ally Tideswell
Head of Finance and Operations: Tom Jenkins
Discover the rest of the team on our website.

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Worcestershire's nature reserves

Dale Sutton



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Oh Christmas tree

Jonathan Cartwright

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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

Volunteer Could you donate your skills and time to help wildlife? We have indoor and outdoor tasks that we need help with. worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteer

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

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

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

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

We want to celebrate our phenomenal volunteers. Whether they're out on our nature reserves, chairing local groups, engaging with the public or doing one of myriad roles, our volunteers are a vital component of our organisation and our mission to protect wildlife into the future.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of conservation in the UK. Within the Wildlife Trust movement alone, there are over 38,000 volunteers; that's more than ten times the number of paid staff. Around 500 of these are here in Worcestershire and without so many people willing to give up their time to help wildlife, we wouldn't be able to protect and manage more than 75 nature reserves. Many of these are Sites of Special Scientific Interest, havens for rare species in our increasingly fragmented natural landscapes.

For the first six years of our existence, the Trust was run entirely by volunteers; it wasn't until 1974 that we obtained a small grant to employ our first member of staff. Volunteers are in our bones, essential to our operation and at the heart of what we do.

Lots of volunteers want to 'give something back' to society or to make Worcestershire a better place for their children and grandchildren. But volunteering also gives something back to the individual. Many volunteers tell us how they love the social aspect of volunteering – meeting new people and making new friends. For those undertaking practical conservation, we hear how it helps to keep them fit and that it's much cheaper (and has a better view) than going to the gym. For others, it improves their mental well-being, whether that's undertaking tasks to keep the grey matter active or interacting with other people. It's rewarding and good fun, even if it can sometimes be tiring work.

Thank you

With your help, we're supporting amazing people to do great things for wildlife



Brian Taylor





Our wild volunteers

Our wild volunteers

We invited four volunteers from across the Trust to join us at Lower Smite Farm for a cup of tea and a chat, listening to their perspectives on what they do, what they get out of it and why volunteering is so important to them. Who better to interview them (and write this feature) than us, Lizzy and Joe, two of the current crop of volunteer conservation trainees.

How did you start volunteering?

Nigel: I first started volunteering one Sunday a month at Ipsley Alders. After I retired last year, I decided I wanted to do more for the Trust and joined the roving team, a group of volunteers who meet twice a week to assist with practical work across all the nature reserves in Worcestershire. I am absolutely loving it!

Joan: My partner has always supported the Trust. When I cut down to two days a week working, he suggested I get involved too so I started on reception here at Smite. Then I started helping out with practical conservation in Chaddesley Woods through the winter and spring. I also chair the Wyre Forest Local Group and help the Trust to sell donated books on eBay.

Maggie: I've been working with the Senior Wilder Schools Officer, Marissa, on the art and education side of things for over three years now. Marissa and I have been down some slightly strange rabbit holes and done all sorts of things together, including a recent art exhibition at The Hive in Worcester. She has been so supportive and such a great boss to work for over this time, it has been a pleasure working with her.

Viv: After living in France I had come back here and my business life had ended. When I returned, I found a copy of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust magazine with a little slip of paper that said the Bromsgrove Local Group was finishing and they needed a new Chair and new committee members. I rang the number and spoke to Ian Reilly, an amazing man who invited me to come in and meet the group. At the meeting, I said Ian was the obvious pick for the new Chair because he was so into his wildlife. But he surprised me and said I should do it! We'd only just met, so it was a bit of a baptism of fire for me.

Can you tell us about what you do?

Nigel: I've now completed a full year with the roving team. It's quite an experience to see all the different seasonal work that we do. We meet here at Lower Smite Farm every Tuesday and Thursday and then go out with one of the five reserves officers and visit different sites. It's great fun and some of it is quite physical. We've been hay-raking recently, which is quite a hard task, literally using big wooden rakes to rake hay to the sides of fields the old-fashioned way.

Joan: I had a committee meeting last night. I spent half a day baking because you can never have a committee meeting without cake! It's a bit of a social; a lovely, jolly affair. We have them four times a year and we always have one at this time of year to make sure all the speakers and walks and everything else are planned from now until December.

As for reception, I never know what's going to hit me on Monday! I've currently got two or three different spreadsheets that I'm filling in for different people, copying and pasting and taking information from sheets of paper. But then someone drops in and says 'can you make some laminated tags and cut them out for me?' and I say 'of course', all in a day's work!

Maggie: Art was completely new at the Trust when I started. My role has been to prod and push Marissa into more artistic directions. For instance, we've worked with schools and colleges to produce art that is being displayed around the cloisters of Worcester Cathedral. Looking out for opportunities like that is part of my role.

One of the most rewarding things for me recently was to see that we'd influenced 16 schools in the county to change their curriculum to involve more art and more nature. Art can be so important for well-being and quality of life. It is all about looking, seeing, thinking and responding to stimuli and what better way to do that than through the natural world.

Viv: When I first started as Chair of the Bromsgrove and Northeast Worcestershire Local Group, 75 people showed up at our first meeting, which was quite amazing. Luckily, I had some great people around me providing support, including



Mike Perry, who is now the CEO of the Trust. Since then, I have started a raffle at our meetings, which has provided a useful extra bit of income. We've managed to raise a good amount of money that we were able to donate to the Trust, handing over a big cheque. I've also got my best friend at the meetings doing the coffee and refreshments, so it's a lovely place to be.

What do you enjoy about volunteering?

Nigel: It's brilliant volunteering with like-minded people and those who are involved in nature conservation. It's fantastic to do good for nature and learn to be a conservationist and I've learnt so much from the officers. A few of the reserves are not open to the public and so it's been great to find them and see what's going on. I've set myself a mission to see all the reserves I possibly can over the next year or so.

Joan: It brings a massive boost in quality of life for me – it ticks all the boxes. I meet some amazing people. Sometimes you get up on a dark morning in November or December and you've got to don your waterproofs. Part of me would like to stay in bed. I *could* stay in bed – I'm a volunteer! But, I get up and go out and, once I'm there, I see all these other people who have made the effort and are out there too. It's like a band of brothers really. You get on with it and it's lovely.

Viv: I want to make a difference for my grandson, who's now three years old. I'm committed and passionate about it and that's all there is to it. I also have a lot of fun while I'm at it and love making people smile.

Why is conservation volunteering so important going forward?

Viv: Conservation is incredibly important and without volunteers it just would not work. It's as simple as that.

Joan: It worries me that people are having to retire a lot older and that all charities, not just the Wildlife Trusts, are going to struggle for volunteers as a result. For instance, I am part of the Chaddesley Woods work party and I think I'm the youngest at 65 years old. If people are going to be working until they're 67, where are the volunteers going to be coming from? Having said that, one of the very positive things about being on the reception desk is seeing the young staff coming through. We're in safe hands.

Maggie: My side of volunteering, helping out in education and inspiring children to be creative, is hugely important in getting the younger generation interested in wildlife. The Wildlife Trusts have never had a lack of interest from older people looking to help out and wanting to protect nature but there is a fantastic opportunity to reach more people through work with schools.

What would you say to someone thinking about volunteering?

Joan: I'd first of all say that it's completely different to being paid. It gives you a different feeling. It's very pleasurable as long as you're passionate about what you're volunteering for. For me, volunteering for the Wildlife Trust gives me such a buzz because I can look at what I've done and say 'I have



Left to right: Lizzy Carron, Joe Edwards, Viv Chandler, Joan Kearton-Jones, Nigel Dyer, Maggie Hobbs

Harry O'Neill

Our wild volunteers

made a difference today'. I can see that difference with my eyes, on my patch, and it's looking better because of what I've done.

Maggie: I think consistency is really important. It's a bit like the Trust knowing it's going to get £10 every month, they need that person to commit. As a volunteer, you need to commit otherwise you won't feel like you're actually achieving something meaningful.

Nigel: Having spent 30 years as a branch manager in an office environment, I now feel a sense of release into the outdoors, bursting free, no matter what the weather is or will be. And to be able to experience our varied seasons with nature; I'm finding it a cathartic experience. I look forward to autumn and winter, which in turn then brings the burst of spring – then we go again. Wonderful.

Viv: Volunteering for the Trust is like being part of a big family. It is a great family to be in and makes you realise that you're always capable of doing more and learning new skills.

Are you inspired to lend a hand?

To find out more, visit:

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteer

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/volunteering-opportunities

Want to hear more from our volunteers?

Listen to our forthcoming December podcast

<https://bit.ly/WildWorcsPod>



Nigel Dyer is a member of the roving volunteer team, a volunteer at Ipsley Alders Marsh and a regular attendee of Bromsgrove and Northeast Worcestershire Local Group meetings.



Joan Kearton-Jones is a receptionist at Lower Smite Farm, chair of the Wyre Forest Local Group and a volunteer at Chaddesley Woods.



Maggie Hobbs is a Wild Art volunteer, bringing her artistic experience and background in teaching to help the Trust with creative endeavours.



Viv Chandler is chair of the Bromsgrove and NE Worcestershire Local Group.



Lizzy Carron is a conservation trainee who joined the Trust after working for a year as a residential volunteer at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Machynlleth.



Joe Edwards is a conservation trainee who recently decided to change career after nearly a decade of working in NHS management.



Wild heroes

Each year we honour people for doing great things for wildlife.

Worcestershire Wildlife Medal



The Worcestershire Wildlife Medal is awarded to those people who have dedicated significant parts of their careers or lives to conserving wildlife in the county. This year's recipient is Colin Grove.

Colin is a life-long naturalist who became involved with Cleeve Prior Heritage Trust when it was established in March 1997. Colin was one of a small group of people who got together in the late 1990s with the objective of conserving old orchards and meadows across the Vale of Evesham, leading to the formation of Vale Landscape Heritage Trust 1999. Colin has been a leading volunteer since the beginning, serving as an active trustee and undertaking every job from administration of the Trust's affairs to selling plums to raise funds. Always involved in practical conservation work, Colin can turn his hand to fruit tree pruning, creating wetlands, planting trees and driving the tractor. He has also encouraged, helped and instructed volunteers.

The Trust now owns and manages around 350 acres of orchards and meadows, especially floodplain meadows, all of great conservation importance as many of these key habitats, once common in the Vale, have been destroyed. All the old orchards contain the nationally rare noble chafer beetle. He has made a huge difference.

For more Medal awardees, visit www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/worcestershire-wildlife-medal



Wild Service Award



Wild Service Awards are given to those with outstanding voluntary service to the Trust.

Steve Chiverton: part of The Knapp and Papermill group, cheerfully ready to help with any conservation task.

Nigel Dunn: part of The Knapp and Papermill group, a stalwart in the Blackhouse Wood group and a committee member of Malvern Local Group.

Keith Evans: a regular on the Monkwood, The Knapp and Papermill and roving volunteer work parties for nearly 10 years.

Mike Gilbert: a hardworking roving volunteer and an inspiration to the team, whether clearing conifer brash planting trees.

Pam Holmes: a regular with the Penorchard Meadows volunteer group, the Stourbridge Local Group and, in the past, a volunteer with education, events and multiple nature reserves.

Rus Madon: created an accessible and useable wildlife survey database and pulled together our volunteer records. Rus is also a minibus driver and regular roving volunteer.

Marion Marsay: part of The Knapp and Papermill group for over 10 years, turning up whatever the weather with a smile.

Geoff Newton: a long-standing regular on the roving work parties. Always ready to get stuck in, Geoff has done it all.

Vice-President

In recognition of many years of service as a Trustee, separate terms as Honorary Officer for Conservation and Resources, and other WWT portfolio roles, Sandra Young is awarded a Vice-Presidency of the Trust.

Local news

Help us to expand Trench Wood

We've got an amazing opportunity to buy 45 hectares (111 acres) of land next to our Trench Wood nature reserve. And for just one week in December, your donations will be doubled.

Trench Wood is one of the county's most important woodlands, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that's rich in wildlife. Yet, like so many other woodlands, it faces growing pressures from habitat loss and fragmentation in the landscape as well as from climate change. Its location in a largely agricultural landscape limits natural connectivity for wildlife.

Purchasing these 45 hectares will allow us to expand and buffer this much-loved nature reserve, doubling its

size and creating the Trust's largest woodland reserve. We'll plant native trees, restore meadows and create new habitats to boost the biodiversity and resilience of the wood, strengthening its connectivity with its wider landscape and protecting it for wildlife and future generations.

Double your donation via the Big Give's website and help us to restore the landscape around Trench Wood so that it too is alive with birdsong, buzzing with bees, fluttering with butterflies and dancing with wildflowers.

Only donations made via Big Give's website between 12.00 pm on Tuesday 2 December to 12.00 pm on Tuesday 9 December will be doubled. Thank you for your support.

<https://bit.ly/WWTMoreWoodland4Wildlife>

Stop the press!

We've been awarded £94,815 by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to begin the first phase of nature restoration in the Forest of Feckenham.

Read more

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/news



Double your donation



Wendy Carter



Brian Taylor

Green Farm – reaching out to ancient woodland

In September we celebrated the end of this fantastic project with features on both BBC Midlands Today and BBC Hereford and Worcester.

If you'd like to discover more about the project and watch our video, visit: <https://bit.ly/MonkwoodCelebrate> and www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/blog/monkwood-musings

We'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who made possible the purchase and restoration of land at Green Farm, next to our much-loved Monkwood nature reserve. The project has achieved so much but here are just a few of the highlights:

5,271 trees planted (lots of regeneration too)

5,700+ volunteer hours

120% increase in bird abundance on Green Farm

230m of hedges planted

350m of hedge laid

700+ people from the local community have helped on site & improved their own patches for wildlife



Record bats

In early September we did our annual survey of lesser horseshoe bats at The Knapp and Papermill and counted 61 emerging from their roost, which is a record number! We also recorded noctules, soprano pipistrelles and a *Myotis* bat.

Gift Aid

Did you know that your membership subscription and donations can go even further if you Gift Aid? For every £1 you donate, we can reclaim an additional 25p from HMRC at no extra cost to you. In the last tax year, Gift Aid declarations from members and supporters provided an extra £180,000 worth of income to the Trust.

Want to know more or to sign up?

Visit www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/gift-aid-explained for more information.

Raffle

Many thanks to everyone who bought a raffle ticket this year; you've raised an amazing £6,122.

The winners are:

1st, Mrs C. J. Greatbatch

5th, Mr A. Johnson

2nd, Mr R. A. Millard

6th, Mr & Mrs A. & H. Giles

3rd, Mrs S. Benjamin

7th, Miss C. Lester

4th, Mrs H. Morgan

Digital magazine

To read and subscribe to a digital magazine, visit www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/magazineNov25



Wendy Carter

Craft fair

Join us at Lower Smite Farm on Saturday 22nd November for our annual craft fair. From paintings and pottery to jams and jewellery, we'll help you to fill those Christmas stockings. Delicious cakes and hot drinks will be available throughout the day and if the sun is shining, why not take the opportunity to head out for a walk on our nature trail. Don't forget to bring cash as not all stallholders take cards.

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/events/2025-11-22-christmas-craft-fair

Pages to pounds

You'll have read on pages 4–8 how important volunteers are to nature conservation in Worcestershire. Joan and her partner, Rich, have raised over £7,000 for our work by selling books that have been donated to the Trust to raise funds.

If you're looking to treat yourself or someone else, why not head to Rich's Ebay store to take a look. Most books are nature and wildlife related but you'll also find local history books too.

<https://bit.ly/RichEb4WWT>

New podcast launched

With thanks to volunteer podcast host, Lee Robinson, the Trust launched our first podcast episode in early October. Each month, Wild Worcestershire will examine an aspect of our work and you'll meet members of our team as well as members of your communities.

You can listen to the podcast on our website, on Spotify or via Apple podcasts.

On Spotify: <https://bit.ly/WildWorcsPod>

On Apple: <https://apple.co/46KJS2P>

Our website: <https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/blog/wild-worcestershire-podcast>



Wendy Carter

Colossal crickets

The UK's largest bush-cricket has been spotted in the county for only the second time. An adult great green bush-cricket was found in the south Worcestershire in 2014 but the species was not seen again until this year when a nymph was seen in the north of the county. Great green bush-crickets, which grow to 7cm in length, have a lifecycle that takes two years so adults must have been present in 2023. If you snapped a photo of a large cricket this year and wondered what it was, please upload it via our short Wildlife Sightings form and tell us more . . . and don't forget to keep a look out for them next summer.

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings

Events near you

Friday 28th November – *The wonders of Oz: wildlife of Australia*. Talk with Stourbridge & Hagley Local Group.

Thursday 4th December – Christmas social. With Wyre Forest Local Group.

Thursday 4th December – *The biodiversity of Castlemorton Common*. Talk with Malvern Local Group.

Wednesday 10th December – Quiz night. With Redditch Local Group.

Wednesday 10th December – *Bats of Worcestershire*. Talk with SE Worcs Local Group.

Sunday 14th December – A stroll in rural Hagley. Walk with Wyre Forest Local Group.

Monday 12th January – *Wetland mammals*. Talk with Bromsgrove & NE Worcs Local Group.

Wednesday 14th January – *The secret life of otters*. Online talk with WWT.

For more information about these, more events and how to book, visit www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on

Communities helping wildlife

Are you part of a community group helping nature? Whether you're planting spring bulbs, sowing mini meadows or putting up bird boxes, why not register your group on our map? Our communities map is guide to help you find more volunteers in your area or to seek other communities to connect to – just like you're helping to connect habitats for wildlife.

For more information visit www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/community-action



Connor McGoldrick

UK news

Ban bottom trawling in protected seas now

Bottom trawling is destroying our seabed – and it's still happening inside Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). This industrial fishing method drags heavy gear across the seafloor, smashing fragile habitats, releasing stored carbon and killing marine life on a massive scale. Then, of what's caught, over three quarters is simply thrown away.

Thanks to Ocean, Sir David Attenborough's latest BBC documentary, the public can now see the destruction caused. But the reality is worse: MPAs, meant to protect the seabed, are being trawled without repercussion. Out of sight cannot mean out of mind. The UK Government's recently launched consultation is looking at banning bottom trawling in 41 offshore MPAs. This is a crucial

step – but only if swift action follows. Partial or delayed protections won't save our seas. The Wildlife Trusts are calling for an immediate ban on bottom trawling in all seabed-protecting MPAs. We must protect entire areas, not just fragments, and finally stop industrial-scale damage in waters meant to be safe for nature.

Marine life can recover. Seabed habitats store carbon, support wildlife, and help secure sustainable fisheries. But 'If we save the sea, we save our world.'

Join us in telling Minister Hardy to ban bottom trawling in MPAs. The future of our seas depends on it.

wtru.st/Ban-Bottom-Trawling

Nature-friendly farming brings wildlife back

Rare birds, bees and butterflies are returning to farms across England thanks to a decade of nature-friendly farming. The Jordans Farm Partnership – a collaboration between The Wildlife Trusts, Jordans Cereals and LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) – has supported 27 farms since 2015 to create tailored conservation plans.

From planting hedgerows and wildflower margins to restoring ponds and improving habitat links, farmers have transformed their land for wildlife. Over half have reported sightings of new or returning species – many of them rare or endangered.

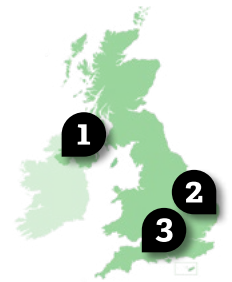
Red-listed birds like the tree sparrows, nightingales and goshawks have reappeared, alongside rare meadow clary plants, found in just 26 UK sites. Other highlights include breeding stone curlews in Hampshire, scarce emerald damselflies in Suffolk and brown hares in Leicestershire.

This inspiring partnership shows what's possible when farming works hand-in-hand with nature – creating healthier landscapes for wildlife, farmers and future generations.



UK highlights

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



Once in a lifetime

When Peter McEvoy first stepped foot on 90-acres of farmland in County Fermanagh, he knew it was a special place: the last remnants of species-rich grassland and centuries-old woodland in Northern Ireland. Ulster Wildlife is now the proud new owner of Fedian Nature Reserve, brimming with wildflower meadows, bird-friendly hedgerows and ancient woodlands. wtru.st/Safeguarding-nature

Cuckoo, cuckoo

Two cuckoos named Arthur and Ashok have been fitted with lightweight satellite tags to track their remarkable trans-Saharan migration. The cuckoos from Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Worlingham Marshes nature reserve will join over 100 others in the British Trust for Ornithology's long-running Cuckoo Tracking Project, to help understand the cuckoo population decline. wtru.st/Cuckoos-tagged



Cuckoo © Jon Hawkins
Tree sparrows © John Bridges

Pine marten kits born

Devon and Somerset Wildlife Trusts are among those celebrating the birth of wild pine martens in a pioneering reintroduction project in the southwest of England. Recorded on site, exclusive footage shows the first kits born into the wild in Devon for more than a century. wtru.st/Pine-marten-kits

Worcestershire's nature reserves

Phew, what a scorcher! Another record-breaking summer, bringing challenges and opportunities for our reserves officers as well as the wildlife found on our reserves. The drier conditions have given us the opportunity to get to reserves where it is often too wet to get into. This has allowed us, for example, to undertake conservation forestry at Grafton Wood this autumn and to take hay cuts on lower lying fields that are normally too wet to cut at reserves like Romsley Manor Farm Meadows, which we started restoring in 2019, and at Feckenham Wyld Moor.

Taking these opportunities to 'make hay while the sun shines' is important because, while leaving some areas of longer vegetation can be important for insects and small mammals, if left for several years nutrients build up in the soil. This allows more aggressive species, such as thistles and nettles, to dominate whilst uncut vegetation builds up into thick mats, all of which further suppresses finer grasses and wildflowers and reduces overall diversity. While we know that occasional cutting of areas not usually mown can be concerning to some visitors, we do think carefully before undertaking the work.

The hot weather has created winners and losers. We continue to see new species moving into the county, such as the willow emerald dragonfly seen at Feckenham Wyld Moor and the great green bush-cricket nymph spotted at Blackstone Farm Fields during survey work. Downsides have been the drying out of pools at Ipsley Alders Marsh, putting localised fish populations at risk, and at Upton Warren's The Flashes where it has been possible to walk across them – not great for breeding bird populations and autumn migrants until significant rain returns.

Unfortunately we also saw a fire at The Devil's Spittleful and Blackstone Farm Fields, which burnt around two hectares of the acid grassland we've been restoring. While the fire department were able to contain it, and the damage wasn't critical, it was in the area where the newly recorded great green bush-cricket had been found, so our fingers are crossed this hasn't set back the colonisation of this species.

More and more, we're having to build in mitigations for climate change on our reserves. At The Devil's Spittleful we are developing a more comprehensive fire plan and will be undertaking some scrub removal and adjustment of fences this autumn to enable better grazing of the scrub and improve access for firefighting. We'll also continue to draw the attention of our visitors to the fire risk and the need to avoid barbeques and other sources of fires on our reserves.

Dariusz Krzan



Paul Lane

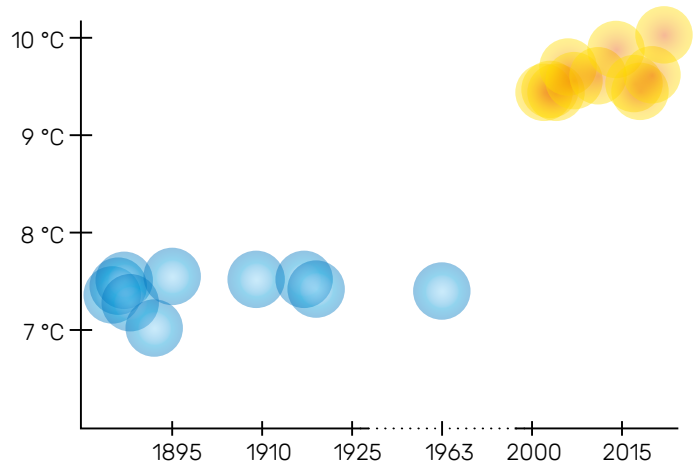
Thank you!

Despite the challenges mentioned, our reserves continue to grow and thrive. Thanks to your very generous support we have now met our fundraising target for the fields at Lower Swell Farm, near Longdon, although there is still the opportunity to support the purchase if you want to assist. These fields, in the wettest part of the historic Longdon Marsh, are close to our Hill Court Farm reserve and are helping build up a mosaic of protected sites in this relatively undisturbed area, so important for wintering wildfowl during the extended periods of flooding. Once the purchase is complete we hope to be able to add extra scrapes and use it to support our management at Hill Court, as well as continue to build links with the local farming community to do more for wildlife.

Track work at The Knapp

The Knapp and Papermill is one of our most popular reserves and regular visitors will be aware of the problems with the main access track down to the orchard, where a large crack appeared two winters ago. This has meant no vehicle access – our only way to the eastern half of the reserve with machinery to cut the meadows and undertake maintenance. While we have managed some of the work without machinery, due to the hard work of our reserve officer and our dedicated volunteers, this has been limited and the habitats will start to decline without repair of the track.

The track's location on a steep bank down to the Leigh Brook and the busy road above means that we are working with an engineering company to put in place a structural solution. Making the problem more difficult are the trees that have grown on the bank over several decades. The thin soils and exposed position combined with more frequent storms has meant that several have blown over and the roots have pulled out large chunks of the bank, further undermining the track. After discussions with our engineers and the Forestry



The ten coldest and hottest years on record. HadUK-Grid dataset from the Met Office.

Commission we felled the trees in October to safeguard the track. We'll manage the trees as coppice as they grow back and will now be able to undertake the engineering work to strengthen the road.

While we appreciate that it will look significantly different, the felling has been necessary to maintain The Knapp and Papermill habitats and preserve visitor access to this favoured spot. Without remedial work, we believe it likely that the track will eventually become unsafe for pedestrians too, removing the main access route for visitors as well as being damaging to the ecology of the site.

Forestry work

During autumn and winter we're also undertaking forestry work at Monkwood, Chaddesley Woods and Blackhouse Wood. The woods will remain open while operations are taking place but please make sure to obey any signs on site to keep safe.

The work is part of regular maintenance to open up the closed canopy in some compartments as trees continue to grow and close in the wood. Opening up areas brings in light and warmth, good for insects and woodland wildflowers, and allows the development of new scrubby regrowth, excellent for nesting and wintering birds. Forestry can look quite startling when it is done but woodlands don't live at the pace of humans – we need to see the results over years and decades. If you visit one of our sites where forestry is taking place, do take the time to compare it with areas worked on three to four years ago and you will see a wealth of wildflowers, eruptions of insects and a bubbling chorus of bird song.



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



HIGH FIVE HIGHLIGHTS



Graham Wilkes



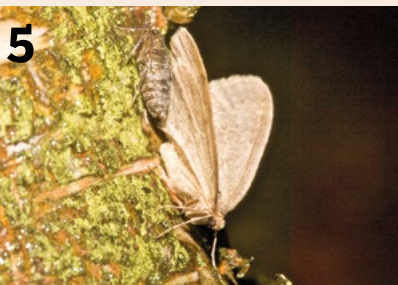
Paul Lloyd



Yana Northern

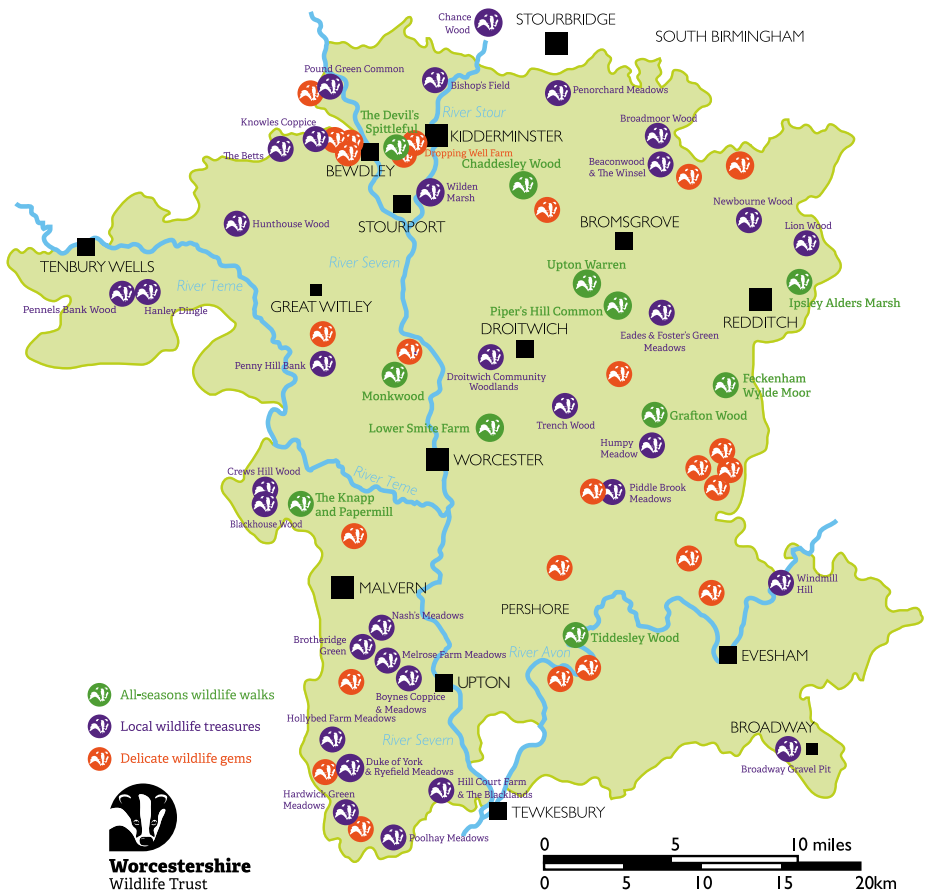


Pete Cheshire



Rosemary Winnall

1. Treecreeper in a woodland
2. Red kite over a field
3. Rowan berries in a hedgerow
4. Shrew in the undergrowth
5. Winter moth on a window



Did you know?

When the weather is cold, common frogs can hibernate underwater for several months. However, most frogs hibernate on land – in mammal burrows, compost heaps or anywhere where they won't lose too much water through their permeable skin.



Dale Sutton

Worcestershire's beautiful brackets

For centuries trees and mushrooms have inspired folklore, influenced culture and played a vital role in our history. Just look at the incredible diversity in the world of fungi and it's easy to see why.

Bracket fungi grow on wood, often with fruiting bodies that can be seen year-round. We're lucky to have a wide variety of woodlands in Worcestershire, so as you walk through these beautiful places see if you can spot some of these fantastic fungi, making sure to stick to the footpaths to avoid disturbing nature.



Brett Westwood

Hoof fungus *Fomes fomentarius*

This bracket fungus gets its name from its resemblance to a horse's hoof. It's a parasite of birch, beech and oak trees but can also be found on dead and decomposing wood. The softer suede-like material within the fruiting body is an effective natural fire starter and was famously found amongst the belongings of Ötzi the Iceman, a naturally mummified neolithic human who died 5,300 years ago.



Rosemary Winnall

Birch polypore

Birch polypore *Fomitopsis betulina*

Birch polypore grows, unsurprisingly, on the dead wood of birch trees. It is a pale, rounded and leathery mushroom with pores on its underside. Polypore means 'many holes' in Latin, with most bracket fungi sharing this feature belonging to the order Polyporales. This fungus was also found on Ötzi the Iceman, possibly used as medicine, and in more recent history has been used to sharpen tools.



Rosemary Winnall

Turkey tail

Turkey tail *Tremetes versicolor*

The beautiful turkey tail grows on decomposing logs and branches of oak, maple and beech and can be found worldwide. The hard fruiting body resembles a turkey's wide fan of feathers and is made up of multiple delicate bands of colour, including shades of red, orange and brown. This is a popular fungi used in Chinese traditional medicine, with its first mention around 200 BC, during the Han Dynasty.

Rosemary Winnall



Oak mazegill

Oak mazegill *Fomitopsis quercina*

Closely related to birch polypores, this specialist saprophyte mushroom grows on oak, often forming on old pruning wounds. The pores on the underside are unique and give the name; they're elongated, thick-walled and branching, resembling a maze. Historically the soft underside was used as an animal brush as well as being burnt to smoke out bee hives whilst extracting honey.

Rosemary Winnall



Giant polypore

Giant polypore *Meripilus giganteus*

A very large bracket fungus that's mainly found on oak and beech, although it's occasionally found on conifers. Unlike most members of this group, this polypore connects to the roots of its host and forms large clumps at the base of the tree, or on the ground around it, where it plays a vital role in breaking down and recycling dead and dying wood.

Rosemary Winnall



Chicken of the woods

Chicken of the woods *Laetiporus sulphureus*

Mainly growing parasitically on oak, this is sometimes found on beech, chestnut and cherry, with its bright orange and yellow colouration making it very easy to spot. Chicken of the woods breaks down the heartwood of its host tree, causing rot holes that allow for the colonisation of a wide range of saproxylic insects that feed on the decaying wood.

Rosemary Winnall



Dryad's saddle

Dryad's saddle *Cerioporus squamosus*

One of my favourite fungi, this is found almost worldwide, growing on a wide variety of deciduous trees and feeding on dead and decaying wood. The large fan-shaped bracket has a brown gradient with feather-like scales on the top and pores underneath. It's named after the tree nymphs of Greek mythology who are said to have sat atop the fungus like a saddle.

Rosemary Winnall



Beefsteak fungus

Beefsteak fungus *Fistulina hepatica*

This striking scarlet bracket grows mainly on oak and chestnut trees. The fleshy fruiting body bears an uncanny resemblance to meat, often looking like tongue or liver. It's a widespread parasitic species across Europe, North America, Africa and as far as Australia. It's associated with vitality and strength in European folklore and was historically snacked on by woodcutters while they worked.

Discover how the Severn Treescapes project is increasing deadwood habitats to benefit these wonderful fungi:

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/severn-treescapes/dead-wood-society



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



Nature's unseen engineers

If all fungi vanished overnight, first you might notice a shortage of tea, coffee, chocolate, wine or simply mushrooms on toast! Some would be grateful for no athlete's foot or dry rot but fungi themselves are largely invisible. Over 15,000 species of fungi have been recorded in the UK but less than a third are visible to the naked eye. We see products and effects but we rarely notice the living beast.

The mushrooms and toadstools we see are fruitbodies, like apples. We rarely see the body of the fungus – the 'apple' tree. Years past, my walk to primary school took me along suburban verges lavished with eye-catching mushrooms. I was fascinated by bright white lawyers' wigs, spongy yellow boletes bruising blue when poked and translucent parasols appearing one day and gone the next. Fungi themselves hide all around – and inside – us!

Closer to humans than plants

One reason fungi are largely invisible to us is the way they eat. Fungal structure consists of mycelium, a microscopic tangle of thread-like hyphae or single celled fungi like yeasts. Both live and feed inside material such as soil, wood, intestinal tract or petrol. Basically, anywhere they can get carbohydrates. Like animals, fungi absorb food from their environment but animals digest and absorb nutrients internally, while fungi digest and absorb their food externally.

Only in 1969 were fungi confirmed as separate from plants – despite fungi being more closely related to animals. Fungi grow their structure from material more like our fingernails than plant cellulose.



Jon Hawkins



Jon Hawkins

Fungi change the world

More recently, we've started to unravel the unseen ways that fungi modify the world. Fungi influence ecosystems through decomposition and soil structure. One recently recognised influence is the mutually beneficial relationship between plant roots and soil fungi.

Closer than hand in glove, mycorrhizal partnerships are so globally vital that if all fungi vanished overnight, 80% of plant species would immediately struggle to survive. These plants trade sugars from photosynthesis for water and essential minerals provided by soil fungal partners.

The increased harvesting power provided by mycorrhizal fungi helps crops and wild plants cope with extreme conditions, such as this year's drought. Ongoing research suggests plants can also biochemically communicate threats, such as insect attacks, to surrounding plants purely via soil fungal networks – sometimes called the 'wood wide web'.



Guy Edwardes/2020VISION

The unseen cost

Being invisible comes at a cost. While 95% of approximately 6,640 global mammal species have been documented, only about 6.3% of an estimated 2.5 million fungal species have been named. Even in the UK, one of the ecologically best documented countries in the world, fungi are under-recorded and mushrooms are often casually picked or destroyed – something we've mostly learnt not to do with wildflowers. People don't love and protect what they don't know.

The fungal kingdom is so understudied that UK firsts still turn up annually and keen novices can record rarities. Beginners are encouraged and there's always something new, even for experts. Fruitbodies are not just found in autumn and winter but can be found all year-round. So, if you spot an interesting mushroom or you'd like to learn from others, contact your Wildlife Trust who should be able to point you towards your local fungus group.

Ellen Winter is a former zookeeper, then youth homeless worker, now ecologist monitoring nature reserve health.

Birds of a feather

Alone or en masse, starlings are shapeshifters. In spring, the adults probing lawns in our parks and gardens gleam with iridescent purples, blues and greens. But in early summer, their newly-fledged youngsters are plain mouse-brown birds that could be a different species. It's not until they moult in early autumn that they gradually acquire the dark, white and buff-speckled plumage of winter like their parents.

Birds of a feather, they say, flock together but few birds do it as dramatically as starlings. They are social birds generally but in winter they come together to stage one of the greatest UK wildlife spectacles of all. In the waning light of a winter evening, vast chattering flocks known as murmurations assemble over their roost sites in reedbeds or woodlands. Singles or small groups pour in from up to 25 km away and coalesce to create gatherings of tens or even hundreds of thousands strong. Now swirling like clouds of living smoke, then undulating in serpentine waves across the evening sky; often, they morph into fantastical forms.

Stand underneath them (taking care to keep your mouth

firmly shut) and you will hear the rush of their wings overhead like the drawing of enormous drapes. You are not the only watcher intent on their arrival. Suddenly the flock divides as a dark shape carves a path through it; a hunting peregrine or sparrowhawk focussed on securing a meal. On dull or wet evenings, the starlings soon land but if the skies are clear, they'll spend time circling over the roost before suddenly funnelling downwards like sand in an egg-timer. In the last vestiges of light you may pick them out, blackening the twigs of trees or bending the reed-stems, twittering like a distant waterfall.

It's a breathtaking sight and raises inevitable questions: where do the birds all come from and why do they roost together?

Under two million starlings are resident in the UK, where our breeding population has fallen by nearly 60% since 1995. Winter numbers are boosted by migrants from northwestern and northeastern Europe, especially Scandinavia and the Baltic countries. As ground feeders that seek soil invertebrates, starlings are vulnerable to frost and snow cover and find the British Isles comparatively warm, wet and wormy.

Having arrived, they roam in flocks over farmland and in late afternoon, they follow other starlings to roost sites that they will use throughout winter. Most UK roosts are in the countryside, often in woodland or large reedbeds, where the



birds feel safer perched in thickets or over water, but they also use clumps of trees in town or on industrial estates. Readers of a certain age may remember the great city roosts of the 1960s when places like Birmingham were thronged with countless starlings packed tightly on office window ledges, their chattering drowning out the roar of traffic below. The birds were unwelcome because of the corrosion damage their droppings caused to buildings and were actively discouraged. Today, this shapeshifting bird has become a major tourist attraction with people flocking to see huge roosts in the Somerset reedbeds or on structures like Aberystwyth pier. Have you spotted a roost near you?

Why flock together?

We may find their aerial antics hypnotic but starlings have better reasons for flocking together than entertaining us.

Safety in numbers

By massing together, starlings confuse aerial predators like falcons and hawks. Their sheer numbers make it harder for a bird of prey to focus on an individual, not to mention all those watchful eyes alerting the flock to danger.

Shared heat

On cold winter nights, it makes sense to share heat with your neighbours. Roosting starlings can pack together tightly, sometimes as many as 500 birds per cubic metre, so are less likely to die from cold.

Sharing information

In roosts, birds can assess the condition and fitness of their fellows and follow them to the best feeding areas. This 'information centre hypothesis' works well as an insurance policy when a new, previously unexploited food site becomes available.

- The largest recorded starling roost in the UK was a staggering six million birds at Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve in Somerset in 1999.
- Starlings are skilful fliers. Computer modelling has shown that each bird only needs to pay attention to seven of its neighbours to avoid a collision.
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had a pet starling that lived in his house for three years. When it died, he was heartbroken and arranged a requiem for it.
- Ancient Romans kept starlings in cages and taught them to imitate human speech. The natural historian Pliny claimed that he knew of birds that could talk Greek and Latin.



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



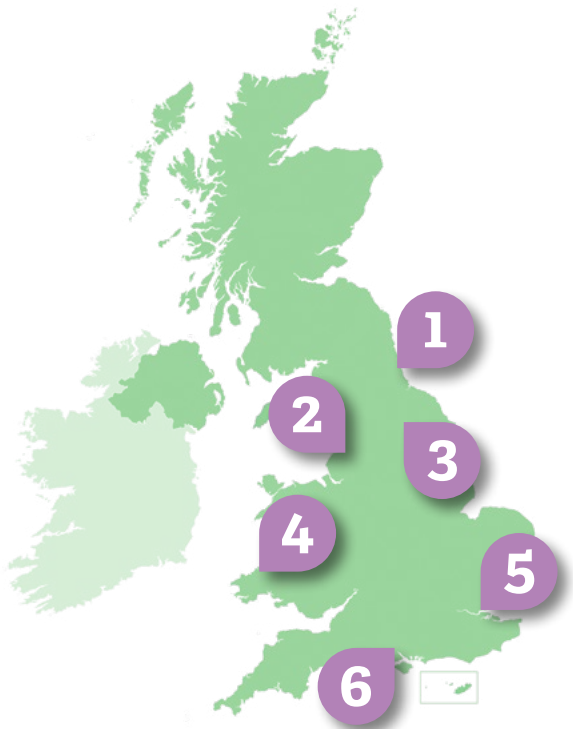
Six places to see starling murmurations

During the winter months, many people travel to special Wildlife Trust nature reserves up and down the country an hour before dusk to witness one of nature's greatest shows – the starling murmuration.

To begin with, fast-moving flocks of starlings arrive from all directions, like a blur in the skies above. Onlookers await in silent anticipation, as breathtaking numbers of starlings increase from groups of hundreds to thousands.

When tens of thousands and upwards have arrived, the murmuration performance begins. The throng of starlings become an awesome spectacle of black swirling shapes as they tumble and swoop in the sky in a synchronised aerial display. The mass of birds twist, turn and soar in mesmerising geometric patterns.

Then on the minute of dusk, the starlings descend in their thousands like a waterfall of birds. They pour out of the sky onto roost sites in trees, reedbeds and nature reserves and it's all over. The lucky spectators will never forget this fleeting moment of incredible beauty and will go home very happy indeed. Here are six places to see starling murmurations.



Did you spot any murmurations?

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

See the spectacle for yourself

East Chevington, Northumberland Wildlife Trust

Flocks of starling swirl in wave-like patterns in their fabulous murmuration attracting hundreds of visitors each year. Terns, water rails and snipe, skylarks and stonechats can also be seen, while large flocks of pink-footed geese fly overhead. Where: Druridge Bay, NE61 5BG

Brockholes nature reserve, the Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside

Head to the floating Visitor Village in November and December to witness the swirling and swooping murmuration that turns the sky above the lakes into a starling spectacle. Up to 100,000 birds gather; so many that you can hear their wings beating. Where: Preston, PR5 0AG

Ripon City Wetlands, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

Ripon City Wetlands nature reserve is famous for its incredible twisting waves of starling murmuration. Best viewed from the path by the central reedbed, watch the cloud of starlings grow as more join – and then descend in a rush of wingbeats and chattering into the reedbed below. Where: Ripon Racecourse, HG4 1UG

Teifi Marshes, the Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales

The stunning Teifi Marshes is one of the best wetland sites in Wales and a great place to experience the sights and sounds of a starling spectacle. Head to a hide or watch from the board walk as thousands of starlings perform a glorious murmuration over the marshes before descending into the reedbeds to roost for the night. Where: Cilgerran, SA43 2TB

Thameside Nature Discovery Park, Essex Wildlife Trust

Watch the spectacle of a murmuration unfold from the accessible 360° viewing platform of the Nature Discovery Centre. Watch the resident starling acrobatics above with the Thames Estuary as your backdrop. Where: Thurrock, SS17 0RN

Fishlake Meadows, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Fishlake Meadows comes alive in winter as up to 80,000 starlings sweep across the dusk sky in murmuration. This fluid ritual draws watchers to the wetland reserve with great views from the canal path and viewing platforms. Where: Romsey, SO51 7AB

Your wildlife

A very big thank you to everyone who has contributed records to Wildlife Sightings this year, making 2025 our best year yet. Together we are creating a dynamic picture of the wildlife of Worcestershire, whether seen in Trust reserves, local parks, supermarket car parks or in your gardens.

Each spring you tell us about breeding frogs and toads. Whilst most frogspawn is recorded in garden ponds, toads prefer larger bodies of water often in parks and other amenity grounds and your sightings are mapping these sites in Worcestershire.

Nine Wildlife Sightings targets are insects and there have been clear winners and losers this year. Both bee species have done better than in 2024, common carder bees seem to be thriving but records of red-tailed bumblebees are still low. This year you have observed and recorded more small tortoiseshell butterflies than in 2024 but still far fewer than in the first years of Wildlife Sightings, reflecting the UK-wide decline in this once common species. In contrast, by July you had submitted more 7-spot ladybird records than in the whole of any previous year.

Wildlife Sightings is providing long-term information about box-tree moths and hummingbird hawk-moths in the county, adding context about foodplants and predation. Your sightings of large red damselflies and broad-bodied chasers have contributed extra breeding data, for which we are very grateful.

House sparrow records remain high, telling us about breeding, feeding and flocking behaviours, but our other bird target, the house martin, is much less often recorded. Let's look out for them next year!

We love to hear about other wildlife species and always try to identify your images, our experts from the Trust and Worcestershire Recorders can often decipher even the blurriest photo. Unusual or scarce species recorded in 2025 included a cuckoo spotted in Claines, glow worms in Bransford, a black-crowned night heron at Grimley and a noble chafer in Alfrick. Perhaps, however, the most surprising sighting this year came in the depths of last winter from near Droitwich canal – unmistakable signs of a beaver!

As winter approaches do look for molehills and please keep adding records to our map of mistletoe in Worcestershire. Tell us about the house sparrows at your bird feeders and let us know if you spot hibernating ladybirds or butterflies.

Thank you once again for all your records and support of Wildlife Sightings, we are looking forward to hearing about your wildlife encounters next year!

To tell us about the wildlife you've seen, upload a photo, video or sound recording to www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings



Diana Westmoreland, Wildlife Sightings volunteer, is a retired scientist with a lifetime passion for nature who enjoys sharing her enthusiasm with others.



George Hauxwell

Creature comfort

In an increasingly sterile landscape, where deadwood in trees is removed, cracks and crevices in buildings filled in and 'untidy' features cleared away, our native wildlife is struggling to find nesting and overwintering habitats. However, we can install features into our greenspaces to give wildlife a home.

Avian apartments

Bird boxes are a simple way to provide nesting habitat for birds and with many places selling boxes, they are easy to get your hands on. However, ensuring you have the right type of box, and a good quality one, may be the difference between life and death for our feathered friends.

Birds can be picky about the size of property they move into and having the right kind of front door is high on their priority list. Robins, for example, prefer an open fronted nestbox, away from neighbours, whilst house sparrows like a terraced box with small entrance holes and friends next door. Whatever species you are trying to accommodate, all birds are looking for a well-positioned box, away from potential predators and protected from the weather.

Chicks are very vulnerable when first born and the inactivity of sitting brooding is a rather chilly job, especially if you've got a draught coming in under the door! Well-made boxes, without gaps in the joinery, are a must to help ensure a successful brood and positioning the box out of the prevailing wind is vital. Conversely, as days warm up, nest boxes in the sun can become too hot; roasting your offspring alive is not an ideal way to ensure their survival. To combat this, nest boxes should be positioned with a north/northeasterly aspect, between 1.5m to 3m above ground level.

How do we help our feathered friends stay cool in the heat of the day and warm in the chill of night? Thick (untreated) wood is great, especially if you're making the box yourself, but woodcrete boxes are better. An eco-friendly building material made from cement and recycled wood fibres, woodcrete nestboxes have taken the avian housing market by storm! Their thermoregulating properties ensure a stable temperature, breathable environment and are fully waterproof, fire resistant, predator proof and longer lasting than traditional wooden boxes.

Lastly, housekeeping services are occasionally required. Outside of breeding season (Oct-Jan), old nesting material should be removed (and composted) to reduce the build-up of parasites. The box should be cleaned and disinfected with boiling water, before being left to dry and reinstated for use



Nick Upton

in the coming spring. You may find that birds and small mammals also use nestboxes over winter to shelter from the wet and cold.

Bat bunkhouses

Bats traditionally roost in veteran trees and building cavities but these niches are becoming few and far between so bat boxes are an ideal way to provide roosting and pup-raising spaces. As small mammals, bats can struggle to stay warm, so woodcrete boxes provide the most ideal temperature-stable homes. Unlike with birds, bat boxes should be positioned in sunny locations (south facing), ideally in pairs on buildings, or around tree trunks, to provide diversity in box aspect and temperature. Clear flight lines in and out of the boxes are key and the boxes should be positioned at least 3m above ground level. Bat boxes do not need to be cleaned and their habitats are protected by law, so can only be inspected by a professional ecologist with a bat licence.

Solitary bee skyscrapers

From holes in bricks and mortar to the hollow stems of last year's sunflowers, some species of solitary bees lay their eggs within linear tubes. Bee houses have become popular staples within garden centres but the quality of material varies.

Bee houses should have a roof to protect them from the rain and should be positioned in a south-facing, sunny location, around 1.5 m above ground level. The tubes within the house, whether they're drilled cavities in a block of wood, natural hollow plant stems or bamboo canes, need to

be at least 7 mm in diameter (up to 12mm) and around 16cm in length, with the back end blocked off. Rough edges and surfaces, especially within the tubes themselves, need to be sanded down to prevent injury to bees' wings.

Hedgehog huts

If you're lucky enough to have a hedgehog visit your garden, then you may wish to consider installing a hedgehog house. These can easily be made from bricks, paving slabs or untreated thick wood; if you're buying one, woodcrete boxes are best. The entrance should face away from the prevailing wind and, importantly, the house should have an entrance tunnel or internal dividing wall to reduce access for predators. Locate your box in an undisturbed and well vegetated section of the garden and don't put food inside as hedgehogs prefer to eat away from their sleeping areas.

Boxes alone won't encourage wildlife to your greenspace as good habitat and food sources is what our wildlife needs most. However, a few boxes may encourage wildlife to stay, allowing you to enjoy their presence year round.



Finley Reynolds, WWT Natural Networks Officer is passionate about providing nature spaces for all.



Make homes for wildlife

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wild-about-gardens

Woodcrete (woodstone) boxes are available online from places like NHBS or CJ Wildlife.

Tom Marshall

Wild notebook



Mustn't forget

Five things to photograph:

- Winter heliotrope in flower
- Witches broom galls on birch trees
- Male and female great tits at the bird feeders
- Broken snail shells around a thrush's anvil
- Dewdrops on seed heads

Five things to do:

- Look at snowflakes through a magnifying glass
- Search for overwintering aphid eggs
- Look out for redwings and see what they are eating
- Watch out for Geminid meteor shower peaking on 14 December 2025
- Find a hazel tree and look beneath for nuts opened by mammals

Photographs by Rosemary Winnall

Pale brindled beauty (male) ***Phigalis pilosaria***

These common moths are active between January and March but only the males can fly, the females being completely wingless. The females emerge from their pupae in underground cocoons and climb up tree trunks where they sit and emit pheromones to attract the males that pick up the scent with their feathery antennae. Their looper caterpillars feed on the leaves of various trees and shrubs. This is one of the moths, like peppered moths, that have evolved melanism; brown-black males may be found in certain urban areas.



Let us know what you spot – take a photo and upload to www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings



***Nostoc commune* alga**

After prolonged wet weather a brown leathery gelatinous mass may suddenly appear on bare gravelly or sandy ground, sometimes over large areas. When dry it is easily overlooked as it forms a thin gelatinous sheet. This is a blue-green algae. At one time it was thought to have fallen from shooting stars!



Red raspberry slime *Tubulifera arachnoidea*

Found in autumn and early winter, these slime moulds are red when young, looking like small raspberries, but are not edible. They may be found on decaying wood in woodland where they feed on bacteria, yeasts and fungal spores. They change colour to orange then purplish-brown when mature.



Rosy woodlouse *Androniscus dentiger*

This 6 mm orange or salmon pink woodlouse is covered with tubercles and has a yellow central line on its back that splits into two near the tail. It is commonly found under stones, logs and bricks in damp shady places including in gardens where it feeds on dead plant matter.



Otter droppings

These may be found along water courses on prominent spots, such as boulders in the middle of the stream, under bridges or on the highest point of a shingle bank. Known as spraints, they have a distinctive sweet smell and may contain bones of frogs and fish as well as pieces of crayfish.



Caddis *Potamophylax cingulatus*

The protective case is formed by the larva, which adds more sand grains as it grows. It feeds on decaying organic matter and moults four times until it reaches 25mm when it pupates inside its case. Several may be found together under stones in small streams with fast flowing water.



Woodpecker sap-sucking marks

On smooth barked trees like lime, maple and sycamore look for peck marks made by great spotted woodpeckers. When the sap is rising in the spring they may reopen old holes or make another line of holes to sip the sap rich in sugars, amino acids and minerals.



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

Oh Christmas tree

If you celebrate Christmas what tree will you be having? A traditional fir? A fake one? None at all? Let's take a closer look at 'Christmas' trees:

- As ice retreated north about 20,000 years ago, Scot's pine followed the ice sheets into what is now Britain but Norway spruce colonised much of Europe.
- Deciduous forests followed, pushing Scot's pine into Scotland where fragments of old forest remain. Scot's pines found across Worcestershire (on the top of The Devil's Spittleful rock, for example) have been planted in more recent times.
- The first recorded Christmas tree in the UK was erected for Queen Charlotte in Windsor in 1800, following the German tradition of her homeland.
- Spruce firs followed, courtesy of Prince Albert in 1840, and the fashion began to take hold.
- The first artificial tree was made in 1930 and since 1947 the City of Oslo, Norway, has given a large Norway spruce to the UK every year; you can see it in Trafalgar Square in London.

- Evergreen pines, firs and spruces can provide important shelter for wildlife through the harsh winter months. Crossbills, siskins and goldcrests have all adapted to use the bounty that these trees can offer.
- Crossbills wait for warm weather to dry and open the cone scales so they can twist them further apart with their crossed-bill tips to extract the winged seeds.
- The majority of Britain's breeding siskins are associated with conifer plantations, where females build neat nests high in the trees using twigs, lichen and feathers.
- Goldcrests, Britain's smallest bird, search for tiny insects and spiders living amongst the conifer's needle-like leaves and even suspend their tiny nests beneath branches.



Seasonal pickings

Project Yellowhammer, the conservation initiative to see this iconic bunting reclaim the heathland of The Devil's Spittleful as a breeding site, has been in operation for almost two years.

Whilst we wait for yellowhammer numbers to increase, its more important aim, that of reducing overall disturbance upon the heath, has begun to show signs of improvement. There are more dogs on leads and fewer visitors using the area that I currently view as the most favourable for recolonisation. This has been achieved by installing information stands, handing out an informative leaflet and issuing a pin badge to those who support the project by keeping their dogs on the lead; so far 30+ badges have been given out as a thank you but there is still quite a way to go.

It may take some seasons for yellowhammers to view the whole heath as suitable breeding territory once again. There are, however, already some encouraging signs in our fields south of the Severn Valley Railway embankment, which is where the remaining yellowhammers have found refuge away from the increased recreational use of the heath.

The private track to the Dropping Well farmhouse is now quiet enough for yellowhammers to have potentially bred along the hedge line there and there may also be a pair breeding on Blackstone Farm Fields.

Despite having so gilded a headline act, there are other winners of Project Yellowhammer's efforts – all the other

species that already call the heath home. With so much pressure on our wildlife, especially birds, a reduction in disturbance is going to increase breeding success and winter survival rates.

Winter survival rates are something that the management of Blackstone Farm Fields and Dropping Well Farm is certainly increasing. One of the disadvantages of modern intensive farming practice is the dearth of spilt seed and the lack of weedy field margins, both previously invaluable sources of winter food for finches and buntings.

A crop of bird seed mix, the general rough, weedy nature of the main fields and supplementary feeding is benefitting not only our resident yellowhammers but is also attracting flocks of chaffinches, linnets, goldfinches and greenfinches during the winter, birds that were previously present only in small numbers.

Top tip

Spending time reading field guides at home will improve your identification skills when you're watching wildlife. It's like homework but much more fun.



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



Mark Hamblin/2020VISION

Life in a teasel head

Julie Gould, wilder childhood officer, and Becky Williams, wild network officer, at Cheshire Wildlife Trust, share their passion for the magical world of winter seed heads and the wildlife they welcome.

Two years ago, Julie shook a teasel head, *Dipsacus fullonum*, over a patch of her garden, releasing the small brown seeds. This plant soon grew to seven feet tall, displaying fresh, bright green foliage. In the summer, the conical-shaped seed head was densely packed with lilac flowers, providing a rich nectar and pollen source for pollinators, such as bumblebees and a variety of our resident butterflies.

The magic of the teasel doesn't end with summer. In winter, its sculptural seed heads become striking silhouettes and, more importantly, they provide a rich food source for wildlife.

One of Julie's fondest wildlife memories

is from her kitchen window, where she spotted a charm of goldfinches balancing on swaying teasel seed heads. Their long, needle-like beaks root around for the small seeds. On frosty mornings, the seed heads sparkled silver in the low light – a truly enchanting sight.

Teasels are just one example of how leaving plants standing throughout winter can benefit wildlife. From the warmth of your house, watch birds like house sparrows feeding on flowerheads.

Consider delaying the cutting of your herbaceous borders until early spring and leaving the leaf piles intact. This is a unique habitat that provides cover for ground-foraging birds, such as dunnocks, as well as hibernating frogs and hedgehogs. Hollow plant stems are a vital over-wintering home for invertebrates, such as ladybirds, earwigs, and butterfly and moth caterpillar larvae. Uncut ivy and hedgerows also offer protection and food to a plethora of wildlife. This winter, resist the urge to tidy too much. A wilder garden is better for both wildlife and our own enjoyment too.





Here are Becky's favourite seed heads to be left in the garden through winter:

Echinacea, *Echinacea purpurea*

Their spiky seed heads stand tall through winter, offering shelter for insects and a vital food source for hungry finches and other seed-loving birds.

Honesty, *Lunaria annua*

These papery silver seed pods are a winter must have. Beautiful and sculptural, providing shelter for insects and lingering seeds when food is scarce.

Ivy, *Hedera helix*

The garden's unsung hero! It's evergreen leaves shelter nesting robins in spring, while fruits and seeds provide a vital food source for other birds in winter.

Knapweed, *Centaurea nigra*

Thistle-like and wild, knapweed bursts with nectar-rich purple blooms in summer. By autumn, its fluffy seed heads feed goldfinches and flutter across meadows.

Miscanthus, *Miscanthus sinensis*

Rustling in the wind, its dense growth offers hiding spots for birds, mammals and insects, plus nutritious seeds through the long winter months.

Rudbeckia, *Rudbeckia hirta*

Resist the urge to tidy! These bright summer blooms leave behind crispy, black seed heads that feed birds and shelter insects, standing elegantly through the winter.

Sea holly, *Eryngium*

A prickly, garden ghost. Spiky, thistle-like sea hollies that thrive in dry, coastal spots. Loved by pollinators in summer and birds in winter.

Sedum, *Sedum anglicum*

Easily Becky's favourite winter plant, sedum's tall flower heads offer late autumn nectar for bees, shelter for overwintering insects and look stunning covered in frost.

Wild photos

Be part of our 2027 calendar!

Do you love photographing wildlife and wild places? Why not enter this year's photo competition!

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

Twelve lucky photographers will win an A4 space in our 2027 calendar and a copy of the calendar. Runner's-up also feature and all entries help us to promote Worcestershire's fantastic wildlife.

We're all involved in judging and we're delighted to be joined again by Pete Walkden www.petewalkden.co.uk and Jason Curtis www.wyrewildlife.co.uk to help with the difficult final decisions.

Don't forget

Do no harm – the welfare of the wildlife and the wild place comes first

Don't get too close – let birds feed their young and move on if they're agitated

Watch your feet – stay on paths, don't trample off-piste

Know the law – familiarise yourself with protected species and the laws that protect them

Know the lure – don't use recordings to attract birds, they can disrupt behaviour and risk the lives of chicks

How to enter

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

Closing date: **Thursday 9 April 2026**

Top tips

- Learn about your subject to know when and how to safely take photos for both you and them
- Try to capture the 'moment'
- Think about light, background and potential distractions in your photo
- Don't let the weather put you off – it might add something different to your images
- Practice, even if it's on something you wouldn't ordinarily take a photo of



Your letters

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

Little owl delight

In the old orchard next to our house there is a family of five little owls. Just delightful. We have daily sightings, watching them dust bath, fly around, and walk and hop along the ground.

Vicky Dodd



Paul Dodd



Carol Moore

Blue tits and poppies

I have not seen this behaviour before – a blue tit pecking at poppy seed heads to get at the seed. Is it common behaviour? Lots of the seed heads in the garden we were visiting had been pecked open and the seeds had gone.

Carol Moore

Ed. Blue tits are great at exploring potential places that food might be lurking, whether that's poppy seeds or the invertebrates lurking within the seedheads.

Shieldbugs



I found these in my garden. The leaf is approximately 3 cm long and the insects are tiny. They look like mini ladybirds but I know they evolve from larvae. I would be grateful if you could identify them for me.

Margaret Davies

Ed: These are green shieldbug nymphs and have just hatched from the egg cases. Rather than egg-larva-pupa, they shed their skin and evolve through a series of nymphal stages – this is their first instar.



White admiral surprise

Our Clent garden is good for wildlife, including butterflies, but in more than 40 years we have never seen a white admiral, which fluttered into our conservatory yesterday. What a beauty!

Andrew Piddock

✉ Sign up to our e-newsletter:

www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/e-newsletter

www.facebook.com/worcestershireswildlifetrust

www.instagram.com/worcswt/

www.flickr.com/groups/

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

www.youtube.com/c/WorcsWildlifeTrustUK1

Insects at Trench Wood

I had an excellent visit to Trench Wood and saw lots of insects; here's just a selection.

Peter Hawcroft



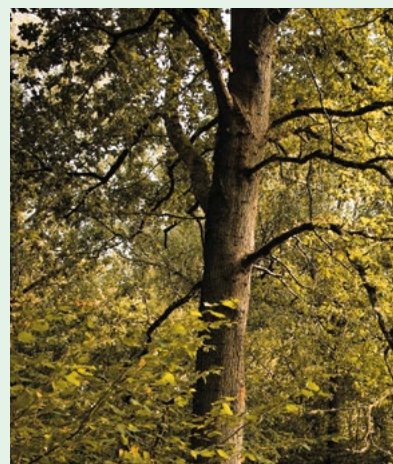
Peter Hawcroft



Social feeds

Lovely to have the company of Julie and Connor from Worcestershire Wildlife Trust who've dug deep to support one of our volunteers in the development of Dines Green Community Garden at the Green Community Hub.

f Green Community Hub, Worcester



Another one I snapped in Monkwood. The canopy was a barrier from not only the hot sun, but also the outside world – it was so quiet and peaceful in there. I always feel better after a walk surrounded by nature, this one might just become my go to!

in Seb Steadman

Wildlife *needs* willpower



Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust

Can you imagine Worcestershire without wildlife?

We can't. It's what makes where we live so special. That's why Worcestershire Wildlife Trust is working every day to keep Worcestershire rich in nature.

But we depend on voluntary income to do our work, including gifts in wills.

Leaving a gift to Worcestershire Wildlife Trust in your will – however large or small – will help to protect Worcestershire's wild beauty for generations to come.

If the time is right, please consider us and make a world of difference to local wildlife.

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

