



# Cemeteries

Havens for wildlife in our towns and cities

## The green man

Meet English Nature's  
new Chair

## Making the link

Bridging the gap between  
local and national BAP work

## Local Record Centres

Recording our wealth of local  
biological data

English Nature is the statutory body which achieves, enables and promotes nature conservation in England.

We do so by working in partnership with individuals and a wide range of organisations including Government, representative bodies, agencies and voluntary organisations.

English Nature Magazine is published six times a year to promote nature conservation in England and make people aware of the latest developments. The views expressed in it by individuals are not necessarily those of English Nature.

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We operate a number of other offices across the country, from where our staff deal with local nature conservation issues.

Details of your nearest office can be obtained by phoning Northminster House, or by requesting a copy of English Nature Facts and Figures Information guide, free from the Enquiry Service at Northminster House, Tel 01733 455100.

You can also learn more about us via the Internet. Our address is:  
[www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk)



Awarded for excellence

#### Cover picture



Cover photographer: Mathew Frith/London Wildlife Trust

West Ham Cemetery –  
A tranquil sanctuary in London's  
East End visited by spotted  
flycatchers and home to ox-eye  
daisies and green woodpeckers.  
(see the full article on pages 6 and 7)

# brief update

## Hopes for red squirrels climb



Red squirrels – on the up

Plans to revive red squirrel populations in Britain have received a boost following the birth of the first animal in captivity. A native of our shores, red squirrel numbers have declined dramatically due to the spread of its bigger foreign cousin, the North American grey squirrel.

The birth is the product of a project set up by English Nature and the Forestry Commission three years ago. Three pairs of breeding squirrels were placed in pens in Thetford Forest, Norfolk, with the aim of creating a population that could be released into the woods.

## "Sea mum!"

Thousands of members of the public recently took to beaches and shores around the country as part of LowTide 2001, a celebration of our intertidal lands and estuaries. Held each year on the Saturday in May with the lowest tide, it seeks to raise awareness of these important – yet little seen – habitats and the species that inhabit them.

Organised by not-for-profit environmental group *riverOcean* and grant-aided in England by English Nature, LowTide events ranged from a family Discovery Walk at Poltesco in Cornwall, to an EcoFayre in Morecambe. Many others went on abroad.



Hands-on experience at LowTide

For further information or to get involved in next year's event, contact *riverOcean* on 01273 234032 or go to [www.riverocean.org.uk](http://www.riverocean.org.uk)

## Doors thrown open on council meetings

At a time when the Government is looking for greater 'transparency', English Nature has opened its council meetings to the public.

The first of these was in May at the Bell Hotel in Thetford, Suffolk. A number of people were there to hear the discussion of key issues, including progress on the NNR Action Plan, the implications of Foot and Mouth Disease for English Nature's work programme, and how industry can be encouraged to be more environmentally aware.

Leading the 14 member meeting in his new role as English Nature Chair was Martin Doughty. Before the meeting, council members took the opportunity to see some of English Nature's local work including the Stone Curlew Project in the nearby Brecks.

## Vote with your wellies

English Nature has joined forces with the National Trust to urge the nation's 27 million gardeners to vote with their wellies and avoid using peat.

The call came as the National Trust revealed the results of a year-long series of trials – overseen by independent experts ADAS – into peat-alternative composts.

Carried out at 14 of Britain's finest gardens, the pioneering trials showed overwhelmingly that gardeners could successfully go peat-free for the majority of plants – a move that would significantly reduce ongoing damage to precious peat bogs which support unique wildlife species.

In addition, English Nature and the Trust have announced a new plan to harvest bracken from English Nature sites in East Anglia. The bracken will be turned into compost for a further series of Trust trials for ericaceous (heather-like) plants such as azaleas, which grow well in peat.

With almost 90 per cent of peat bog habitats lost over the last century, plus a boom in use of peat in gardening, particularly due to the popularity of patio pots and hanging baskets, the existence of species such as the colourful sphagnum moss is becoming fragile.

On announcement of the results of the study, English

Nature's Chair, Martin Doughty said, "Peat bogs are a unique and highly precious habitat which English Nature wants to see survive for future generations to enjoy. If they disappear, England will be a poorer place for it.

"A major part of the battle is to make the public aware that there are feasible alternatives to peat bog growing mediums for the garden – and the National Trust is showing the way ahead. We support the trials wholeheartedly and hope that the peat-free message spreads. It is vital that it does, otherwise a national treasure will be lost forever."

## 'Access' boost of £10 million

English Nature has received a welcome £10 million boost from the Government to improve public access and information on National Nature Reserves (NNRs).

Through an award under the Treasury's Capital Modernisation Fund, English Nature will receive an additional £5 million to its grant-in-aid in the next two financial years, 2002/03 and 2003/04.

The funding will be targeted in three specific areas each with the aim of bringing people closer to nature:

- Increasing public access to NNRs – At the end of March 2001, there were

208 NNRs covering 83,560 hectares, scattered through England, from Lindisfarne in Northumberland to the Lizard in Cornwall. The aim is to increase disabled access and nature trails and improve signing and site information.

- Establishing an on-line information resource for the general public called Nature On-line. This service aims to help the public identify and learn about the local wildlife sites, discover opportunities to get involved in local conservation work and learn more about and contribute to wildlife policy.

- Improving the conservation value and accessibility of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) including removing threats to these sites from very old planning permissions, which have not yet expired.

"We were crossing our fingers at English Nature in the hope that we would win an award" said English Nature's Chair, Martin Doughty. "We have always wanted to create more opportunities for the public to experience and understand the special wildlife we have in England. With this extra money we can take these exciting ideas forward and make them become a reality."

## NEWS IN SHORT

### Come and see us!

English Nature will have a stand at the forthcoming Game Fair and Birdwatching Fair. Experts will be on hand at both events, and everyone is welcome to come along and find out more about us and our work.

The CLA Game Fair is 27–29 July at Shuttleworth Old Warden Park in Bedfordshire and The British Birdwatching Fair is 17–19 August at Rutland Water.

### Hedgehog workshop

Hedgehogs are to take centre-stage at a one-day workshop to be held in Birmingham on 8 September. Organised by The Mammal Society and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society, the event will see leading experts Dr Pat Morris and Dr Nigel Reeve discuss the ecology and lifestyle of hedgehogs, rehabilitation and caring for sick hedgehogs, plus the problems that they can cause.

Booking is essential and tickets cost £25 (including lunch). These can be obtained by calling The Mammal Society on 020 7498 4358.

### SSSI awards

Two important Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) awards have recently been presented by English Nature in Essex, part of a national scheme to recognise services to an SSSI beyond the call of duty.

First was the MoD, and in particular Range Superintendent Chico Duncan, who were awarded for their wetland management programme, which has safeguarded marshes close to a firing range in Colne Estuary SSSI. Staff and management at Exchem Organics, a chemical firm with a facility in the Hamford Water SSSI, have been recognised for wildlife management work within the boundaries of the plant. This includes restoring ponds and ditches and erecting owl boxes.



# brief update

## NEWS IN SHORT

### Departmental moves

As part of the recent Government changes, English Nature now comes under the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). This Department brings together environment and countryside with agriculture (previously MAFF), and should provide additional opportunities for closer working in the future.

English Nature remains a responsibility of the Environment Minister, Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP.

### Gardening for wildlife

A database of garden flora and fauna is being developed by English Nature for those members of the public who want to attract wildlife onto their patch. Due to be launched in a CD ROM format in September, the database provides details of a range of plants plus the mammals, amphibians, birds and invertebrates they attract. Entries for each animal will likewise show the plants they are attracted to. The database will cost around £10 and will be published by The Plant Press.

English Nature has also helped fund the Gardening for Wildlife project, a joint initiative in Northumbria between Cramlington Organisation for Nature and the Environment (CONE) and the House Builders Federation. The purpose is to distribute a copy of a Gardening for Wildlife booklet to new house purchasers in the region, promote the benefits of wildlife friendly gardening through show home gardens, and adopt wildlife friendly principles throughout the whole site development process.

For further information about the wildlife database contact Steve Berry at English Nature's Sussex and Surrey team on 01273 476595. For details on the Gardening for Wildlife Project contact CONE on 01670 542386/542384.

## NNR's expanded horizons



Aston Rowant NNR – bigger and with better access

Following English Nature's purchase of 100 hectares of land at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve (NNR) in Oxfordshire last autumn, the public are having their first opportunity to explore the newly expanded site following the Foot and Mouth outbreak.

Re-opened early last month, the NNR is one of England's richest examples of chalk downland and supports a large population of juniper, as well as extensive beechwoods and areas of chalk scrub. It is also particularly well known for its red kites.

The purchase, assisted by a grant of £140,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, increases English Nature's holding to over two thirds of the reserve, and includes a number of adjoining fields.

There are currently plans to improve visitor access and establish it as a major visitor attraction in the Chilterns.

Site Manager Graham Steven said, "The acquisition is a major step forward for English Nature. It clearly demonstrates that we are serious about opening up NNRs to the public. The addition of the adjoining fields improves access and also provides tremendous opportunities for us to re-create chalk downland and carry out management for declining birds like lapwing and skylark."

## Lagoon guidance

An important piece of guidance is currently in production to help in the creation, management and monitoring of saline lagoons, one of our most important maritime habitats.

The guide has been funded by English Nature, the Environment Agency, the RSPB and the Worldwide Fund for Nature, and published on behalf of the Saline Lagoon Working Group (SLWG). It is intended to improve understanding of the habitat and its needs, while supporting the Saline Lagoons Habitat Action Plan.

This is very much a first step – an update is planned for publication within the next two years, as a contribution to two LIFE-funded projects.

**Copies of *Saline lagoons: a guide to their management and creation* will be available soon from the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/1/2.**

## Level benefits for Somerset wildlife

Birds, plants and insects on the Somerset Levels and Moors are soon to benefit from a project to raise water levels on Moorlinch Moor, near Bridgwater.

It is hoped that the joint conservation initiative between local farmers, English Nature, the Environment Agency, the King's Sedgemoor and Cary Valley Drainage Board, and MAFF will safeguard and enhance wildlife on the Site of Special

Scientific Interest (SSSI).

As part of the project, around 150 hectares of land will enter the Somerset Levels and Moors Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme with fourteen farmers receiving payments from MAFF. Once work is completed in September, four new water level control structures will keep ditches full during winter months and provide soft ground conditions and shallow 'splash' flooding.

Over-wintering species such as teal and lapwing for which the Moors and Levels are internationally renowned will benefit as will plants and insects in the ditches, given the better protection due to higher water levels. Other farmland birds, which are declining in the wider countryside, such as skylarks and reed buntings will take advantage of the low-intensity grazing and hay making carried out across much of the SSSI.

# The green man

Pressed for a definition of his profession, **Martin Doughty**, the newly appointed Chair of English Nature, considers the question for a long, thoughtful moment.

"I think my trade, if there is such a thing, is as an environmentalist," he finally suggests, opting for a description which goes some way towards covering his extensive range of 'green' concerns and interests.

The 51-year-old former leader of Derbyshire County Council, Chairman of the Peak District National Park, and Chairman of the Association of National Park Authorities was trained as a chemical and public health engineer, and was a senior lecturer in environmental management at Sheffield Hallam University until 1995.

It was about that time that his work as leader of Derbyshire Council and his involvement with the National Park and other public bodies began to take over – for the past six years, he has been a full-time politician and public servant.

He has gained a reputation in that time as one of the most environmentally-aware local authority leaders in the country and the promotion of a sustainable, efficient public transport system is always high on his personal agenda. A former chairman of the county's Planning and Countryside Committee, he launched the award-winning *Greenwatch* newspaper and conservation awards scheme, and led the county from being the only one capped by a Labour Government to becoming Labour Council of the Year for Innovation at this year's Labour Party conference.

His interest in nature conservation stems, like so much of this Derbyshire-born, Derbyshire-bred man, from his home town of New Mills, in the north-west of the county. He was appointed to the parish council at the tender age of 26, to help out on some public transport proposals, and recalls with pride when the council stepped in, along with the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, to purchase two species-rich wildflower meadows by the River Goyt, both Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). "They had been bought by the Department of Transport in readiness for a threatened by-pass, but we saved them, and now they are there to be enjoyed by townspeople and others using the Goyt Way."

Apart from working closely at the National Park with bodies like English Nature and the Wildlife Trust with the National Park, Martin Doughty's personal nature conservation interests are mainly flowers and birds, and he is a member of the RSPB. He is particularly proud of the Park's record in agricultural reform, saving many more Peak District flower-rich meadows through its Farm and Countryside Service.

So what are the main challenges he sees in his new role? Apart from the important work of its statutory responsibilities, such as seeing through Part Three of the Countryside and Rights of Way

Act, Martin sees rural tourism and the reform of agriculture, post foot and mouth, as the major opportunities.

"I think there is lots of scope for English Nature to get more involved in the rural economy and developing nature tourism, obviously in a sensible and sensitive way," he says. The other area where Martin believes that the work of English Nature is "absolutely crucial" and where it needs to be fully involved with all the other agencies is the future of agriculture, which has been made much more urgent by the Foot-and-Mouth crisis. "We need to see Foot-and-Mouth as an opportunity, at national, regional, European and actually at world trade levels, to reform agriculture and in particular, the Common Agricultural Policy."

"We need to pay farmers to do things that are in tune with the environment, and stop paying them for things which are not. English Nature has got to come in very strong on those things where nature conservation is an issue. The one with which I am most familiar with is in the uplands, where there is substantial evidence of the loss of birds, particularly waders like lapwing and curlew, because of insensitive management."

And he believes that English Nature also needs to be, and will be, heavily involved in keeping up pressure for the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy by 2003.

Martin was recently knighted in the Queen's Birthday Honours. "Although the honour was primarily for my work as leader of Derbyshire County Council I hope it will be of benefit to English Nature," he said, "and to the cause of nature conservation generally in the future."

Martin Doughty was interviewed for English Nature Magazine by Roly Smith, chairman of the Outdoor Writers' Guild and media consultant for English Nature in the Peak District.



# Hidden treasures

Think of an urban greenspace and you immediately think of a park or common. Yet cemeteries and churchyards play an equally important role in sustaining wildlife in our cities. English Nature has contributed to a recent report that proposes to give them the credit they're due and safeguard their value to biodiversity for the future.

Broadway Cemetery, Peterborough – This supports the largest population of meadow saxifrage in Cambridgeshire.

West Ham Cemetery

As places of quiet remembrance and private mourning, we often fail to see the wide range of habitats that cemeteries and churchyards offer. Alongside the artificial features such as high maintenance lawns, ornamental flower beds and shrubberies are grasslands, heath, ancient and secondary woodland, scrub, hedges and ponds unchanged from before countryside became city. Buildings, monuments, tombs and headstones, made from a variety of rocks, can also provide support for lichens, mosses and ferns, as well as providing geological interest. Additionally, a large number of rare species of animals and plants, in particular wildflowers and fungi, are found in cemeteries and churchyards.

“Cemeteries and churchyards can play a key role in the implementation of local Biodiversity Action Plan targets,” says Mathew Frith, Urban Advisor in English Nature’s Environmental Impacts Team. “Many cemeteries support an important diversity of wildlife, and in some cases act as valuable refuges for rare and uncommon species and habitats, especially in the urban and suburban context. For example, Morden Cemetery in London features relict neutral grassland and supports the only green-winged orchid colony in the capital. Peterborough’s Broadway Cemetery meanwhile holds the largest population of meadow saxifrage in Cambridgeshire, and The Rosary in Norwich supports heather and wood speedwell, relicts of ancient heathland no longer present in the city.”

*“Many cemeteries support an important diversity of wildlife, and in some cases act as valuable refuges for rare and uncommon species and habitats, especially in the urban and suburban context.”*

A threat, if there is one, is the speed with which cemeteries and churchyards are ‘filling-up’. Many Victorian urban cemeteries are full and are expensive to maintain in their former glory; others are derelict and subject to vandalism. With this in mind the House of Commons’ Environment Sub-Committee last year commissioned a report into cemeteries and crematoria, looking at a variety of issues, such as cemetery management, their role within society, and issues that need to be addressed for the provision of future burial operations.

Mathew believes, “This was an opportunity to ensure that biodiversity conservation and people’s contact with it was included within the debate. Fortunately, conservation efforts over the years by many local organisations have made this easier. Many ‘Friends of’ cemetery groups, local authorities and wildlife groups have worked hard to ensure that cemeteries are managed to conserve biodiversity as well as fulfil their other important functions. In particular the Living Churchyards & Cemeteries Project has been invaluable in raising awareness of the natural heritage of cemeteries and encouraging local people’s participation in conservation. However, the project has since stalled due to lack of funding.”

Interest in the report, published in March, proved to be high with 123 organisations and individuals submitting evidence to the inquiry. Although only four of them represented mainly environmental concerns – English Nature, the Environment Agency, The Living Churchyards & Cemeteries Project and Garden History Society – the issue of cemeteries acting as a wildlife resource, especially in urban areas, was well reflected.

It appears that there is at long last a belated, but welcome official recognition of how important cemeteries are socially, culturally and environmentally, especially within towns and cities. Mathew explains, “Cemeteries can play a useful role in the provision of multi-functional green

networks within the urban fabric, for people’s contact with nature, and other broader environmental benefits. English Nature’s recommended standards for access to natural greenspace can be employed by local authorities within Local Plans to assess what contribution cemeteries can effectively make. In addition, measures taken by local authorities to conserve biodiversity and facilitate the public enjoyment and understanding of it should be encouraged in cemeteries in which they have a holding.

Below: West Ham Cemetery

The report lists over 40 recommendations, including:

- English Nature and English Heritage should work together to formulate special assessment procedures for cemeteries, which encourage co-operation between those seeking to protect their built and natural heritage value;
- appropriate management of cemeteries, in consultation with local Wildlife Trusts and other interested parties, to achieve the maximum biodiversity potential;
- that the Government considers ways to help the Living Churchyards & Cemeteries Project to continue and extend its good work in regenerating cemeteries and burial grounds; and
- the management of a cemetery to conserve its wildlife must not become an excuse for neglect.

“Declaring appropriate cemeteries as Local Nature Reserves is a recommendation and English Nature has successful examples of this in practice at Stroud’s Bisley Road Cemetery and Abney Park Cemetery in north London.”

Above: Chingford Mount Cemetery, London – A local wildlife site where skylarks have bred and the woodland supports tawny owls and bats



# Making the link

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan is now starting to bear fruit for our rich variety of plants, animals and habitats. Yet how much more could be achieved if the work at local and national levels was more closely integrated? English Nature is funding two new key appointments to find out.

Introduced seven years ago, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) has brought much needed co-ordination to conservation efforts at a national level. It has drawn together bodies from English Nature and The Wildlife Trusts, to MAFF and the Natural History Museum for the simple goals of maintaining and improving biodiversity in the UK, contributing to global biodiversity, and raising public appreciation into the bargain. It has put in place action plans for more than 400 species and 45 priority habitats nationwide. For the participants, closer working has meant less duplication and better use of resources.

At the grass roots level, Local BAPs seek to protect the characteristic wildlife and habitat that make a given area unique. Developed, implemented and resourced by organisations with a local focus, such as wildlife trusts, local councils and voluntary bodies, they do much to encourage community involvement, ensuring that the work done now is well maintained and supported in the future.

Action plans are in place for the common otter, one of the 400 plus species that fall under the UK BAP.



English Nature

National and local – it's clear that the lessons and findings from each need to be filtered one into the other, but with over 100 Local BAPs from Carlisle to Cornwall, it's a complicated business. To ensure a closer fit between both perspectives, English Nature is funding two new Co-ordinators.

"The environment and biodiversity play an important part in local infrastructure," says Alison Barnes, who earlier this year was appointed Local Biodiversity Action Co-ordinator at the Biodiversity Policy Unit of The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. "And these local and regional priorities are becoming much more important in national decision making. Placing this at the heart of policy and decision making by linking in LBAPs is a key challenge.

"I've been speaking to a lot of people in different regions over the last few months to get the communication process going," she adds, "but having spent five years co-ordinating LBAPs in both England and Scotland, I already have a good understanding of the broader picture."

Alison's key objective is to co-ordinate the development and introduction of LBAPs in England, and to make links between local and national partners. This she is doing by giving LBAP organisers guidance on how they

should interpret national policy locally while feeding local and regional findings into the UK BAP. She is also responsible for reporting those findings to a wider audience and organising national workshops where local bodies will have the chance to share best practice and ideas.

## Helping to deliver the UK BAP

This year alone, English Nature's UK BAP work has focused on some 17 priority habitats in England.

As lead agency for our precious wetlands-grazing marsh, reedbeds, raised bogs and fens – English Nature has focused strongly on areas such as the Somerset Levels and the Pevensey Levels, Sussex. In particular, it is helping to raise water levels and better manage the environment for species such as the great silver water beetle, sharp-leaved pondweed and common otter. Working closely with the Environment Agency and local partners in the Pevensey Levels (see March 2001 issue), the aim has been to achieve nearly 10 per cent of the UK restoration target for this type of habitat.

A key issue for 2001 has also been to establish maritime BAPs to protect our coastal water habitats. This has covered everything from meeting targets for creating coastal saltmarsh, to reviewing the status of native oyster stocks as a basis for future work with the shellfish industry.

Working with Alison in a complementary role is Charlotte Gault, Local Biodiversity Action Facilitator, who took up her post in May and is based at The Wildlife Trusts' UK office at Newark. Their roles do cross over, but if Alison's focus is largely at a national and policy level, Charlotte's is to get things moving closer to the ground – promoting and supporting LBAP production and implementation across England. She provides hands-on support to LBAPs, collates best practice, promotes the establishment of local biodiversity partnerships and organises regional workshops. She too has a strong LBAP background.

"LBAPs have achieved impressive results in recent years, bringing together diverse partners to take concerted action for wildlife," she adds. "We need to make sure that national partners are aware of these local successes. Promoting public awareness of local biodiversity has been a real strength of many LBAPs and provides experience that can be shared more widely. A great deal of really innovative work for wildlife and for people continues to emerge from the local BAP process.



Alison Barnes (left) and Charlotte Gault (right)

"Our ultimate goal is to ensure that biodiversity planning will become a much more integrated and effective process, both through my facilitating the exchange of experience and ideas between LBAPs, and Alison co-ordinating the channel of communication between local, regional and national levels."

Anyone wishing to find out more can visit the new UK BAP website on [www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk) or contact Alison/Charlotte direct on 0117 987 8817/01636 677711.

# Net gains

The Internet has become an important tool for English Nature as it seeks to share the benefits of its work with a wider audience. Recent improvements to the website have been made with two words in mind: 'access' and 'awareness'.

English Nature's website, packed with useful information, was relaunched last November. Fiona Pugh, English Nature's website manager explained, "We've always seen the Internet as a fantastic promotional tool and are trying to make as much of our information as possible available to a wide audience. When the site was redesigned we felt it was crucial to improve accessibility and navigation, so, for example, we introduced drop-down menus and interactive maps."

The revamped site has a colourful homepage which guides the user to six key categories – *news, about us, science and research, publications and maps, special sites and contact us* – as well as an interactive map.



With the Internet now a primary

[www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk)

communications tool, the 'news' section of the site should be most users' first point of call for up-to-date information and press releases. The 'publications and maps' section is also popular with an extensive library of documents available – ranging from English Nature's Annual Reports to research reports and journals. "We have a policy of making as many of our publications available on the site as possible" continues Fiona. "These can be viewed using the free Acrobat Reader – which can be downloaded through the link to the Adobe website."

A further enhancement is the 'special sites' section which features all you need to know about key designated sites such as National Nature Reserves (NNRs),

Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserves. In addition, the 'science and research' pages take a closer look at European Heathlands, Natural Areas and Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP) and work is in progress to extend the Biodiversity pages further. Peter Brotherton, BAP Information Officer explained, "The improvements are designed to give greater access to biodiversity information. Users will have access to data on all BAP species and habitats, including an English Nature contact for each. In addition, we are adding new pages on the

Biodiversity Grant Scheme, allowing the user to download an application form and search for information on projects that are currently supported by the Scheme".

Work is underway on a

further addition to the site – virtual tours of NNRs. Fiona explained, "The virtual tours are our first foray into multi-media on the site, the user will be guided through a National Nature Reserve by a mixture of video, still photography, ambient sounds and narrative. The aim is to make NNRs available to those who can't physically get to them. It's set to be an exciting addition – it's great to think that people anywhere in the world will be able to visit NNRs and see the work we do from the comfort of their own home."





# Wildspace!

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) give some people their first experience of nature. For others it is their only option. Through a new grant scheme called Wildspace!, English Nature and the New Opportunities Fund are working together to encourage more LNR declarations and to improve and extend existing LNRs.

English Nature is keen to promote the many benefits a diverse and healthy natural environment can bring. LNRs are more than recreational parks, they are full of interesting wildlife. They offer a chance to experience green spaces, quiet places away from the noise of traffic or industry, and to see and hear the wealth of colour and sounds that diverse wildlife provides – a chance to relax in a bit of countryside without travelling miles.

Wildspace! is a new grant scheme, made possible by £4.6 million lottery award from the New Opportunities Fund Green Spaces and Sustainable



The veteran beech trees at Bincombe Beeches

Living on the dead elm tucked amongst the beech trees is a rare beetle *Hallomenus binotatus*, which has never

been found anywhere else in Somerset. This, plus a number of rare invertebrates that live on dead wood were also reasons to make the site an LNR.

Mike Edgington, English Nature's Conservation Officer for the area, has been working closely with the Town Council.

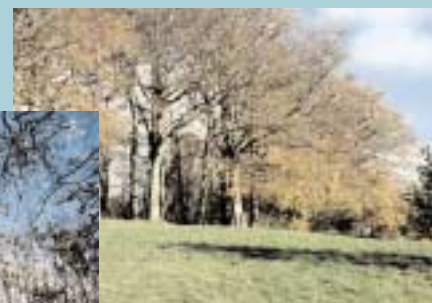
"In declaring an LNR, the Town Council has accepted a responsibility to ensure the site is maintained. They have agreed a five year Management Plan, and the LNR promises to make an important contribution to local biodiversity which future generations of local people can enjoy."

LNRs are very much about local people getting involved in improving their environment. English Nature wants LNR managers, local authorities, councils and local people, to come forward for a Wildspace! grant – between £5,000 and £25,000 is available for each project.

## Recently declared LNRs that could benefit from Wildspace! include:

### Bincombe Beeches, Somerset

Only the second LNR to be declared by a town council ever, Bincombe Beeches in Crewkerne is set on a hill overlooking the town. As its name suggests, a major feature of the reserve are its mature beech trees, a number of which are so old they are classed as veteran trees. It is also a wonderful spot for a panoramic walk and is much loved by the local community.



### Ali's Pond, Berkshire

In the heart of the Thames-side village of Sonning is Ali's Pond LNR, named after local resident and wildlife conservationist Alastair Driver, who conceived, designed and led the project to convert a neglected area of Parish Council-owned land into a mosaic of valuable wildlife habitats.

Originally, most of the site was poor for wildlife, having been the village bowling green only 20 years before, but is now managed as a hay meadow and supports a wide variety of grassland wildflowers including cowslip, pepper saxifrage and black knapweed.

The main feature of the reserve is a large pond, which is home to a healthy breeding population of great-crested newts. In addition, 40 species of wetland plants and 15 species of dragonfly have been recorded. The reserve also boasts other important species, such as stag beetle, song thrush, grass snake, harvest mouse and bullfinch.

Because of its wildlife value, the reserve is already a much-loved amenity for local residents and, since the summer of 2000, has been used by nearby schools for environmental studies.

Sonning Parish Council plans to have an official launch later this summer, to celebrate an achievement of which the whole village can be proud.



Under construction – Ali's Pond in March 1997

Local children meet the residents of Ali's Pond

# Local Record Centres

## Recording our wealth of local biological data

When completed, a new national network of Local Record Centres (LRCs) will unlock access to Britain's vast wealth of local biological data. They will be the vital local element of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), an initiative to share information about wildlife across the UK.

Under the NBN, key conservation organisations including English Nature and LRCs become 'custodians' of their own biological data and take responsibility for managing and disseminating this information to other partners and the wider world. English Nature is running a pilot to assess how information from several of these centres can be mobilised to paint a bigger and more detailed picture of our environment than ever before.

Used extensively by both individuals and organisations, LRCs should function as a public service, helping to inform anything from planning permission to a local naturalist's interest. They are generally funded and maintained independently by local councils, wildlife trusts or volunteers. With little or no previous co-ordination between centres, national coverage has

*"Our local teams have been given the resources to help set-up and establish centres in their areas as they in turn will benefit hugely from the ultimate sharing of information that will take place."*

been patchy at best and standards – and the precise information recorded – have varied from centre to centre. Yet, key local, regional and national conservation bodies have been unanimous in their support for LRCs and agree that a co-ordinated, standardised network is vital if future national strategies are to have the reliable data that they need.

"Working on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) really highlighted the problem," says Sara Hawkswell,

Biodiversity Information Manager of The Wildlife Trusts. "There seemed to be no standard mechanisms for monitoring and measuring wildlife locally and it was proving really hard to get a standard local picture."

Working alongside other partners in the NBN, including English Nature, The Wildlife Trusts have led a project to develop a common framework for LRCs, giving guidance and advice on how they should be run, and to encourage local partners to get involved in their development. These LRCs, would then be local data custodians within the NBN.

One of the first phases of this project has been the establishment of three pilot centres in England, Scotland and Wales, which along with work from existing LRCs, has been documented to provide a standard approach. Building on these, it is hoped that a network of around 60 LRCs, can be developed across the UK by 2007.

The pilot in England is based at 'reCOrd', the Biodiversity Information System for Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and the Wirral, and is run by manager Steve McWilliam.

"We're working with LRCs across England to establish an agreed

set of standards so that more can be created. An accreditation scheme is also being established to promote the standards and encourage local partnerships to develop LRCs to those standards. The goal is that they will provide reliable, accurate and validated information with safeguards in place to control the release of data on sensitive species."

LRCs will use electronic systems to store information, as this makes analysis and integration with other types of data easier.

Some of the information will be sourced in the first place from wildlife organisations, although the majority most will come from volunteer naturalists and local experts, creating a sense of community involvement in, and ownership of, the project.

Steve concludes, "Ultimately, anyone should be able to access local information across the whole of the country via an NBN internet site".

While pilot trials go on to standardise processes and communication between LRCs, English Nature is taking a leading role in predicting just how the network will work in practice through one particular scheme.

"We currently have a project going on in the South West where we are pooling the resources of seven LRCs," adds Patrick Cloughley, NBN Data Officer for English Nature. "It's a kind of 'mini' network to find out more about the extent and state of BAP priority habitats in the area."

Begun in April this year, the pilot is due to run for three years. "Importantly, it will not only show how the network might function, but will inform English Nature's own information management policies in the agency's role as an NBN data custodian.

"We're lending our full support to the LRCs. Our local teams have been given the resources to help set-up and establish centres in their areas as they in turn will benefit hugely from the sharing of information that will ultimately take place."

### The seven LRCs making up this pilot are:

1. Truro, Cornwall
2. Exeter, Devon
3. Dorchester, Dorset
4. Taunton, Somerset
5. Devizes, Wiltshire
6. Bristol, Avon
7. Stonehouse, Gloucestershire



# Meres to mosses

## The wetland lifestory continues

Exceeded only by the Lake District and Norfolk Broads as England's top wetland area, the Meres and Mosses of Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire, nevertheless, remain little known among the general public. With deterioration in their water quality and the loss of valuable species becoming a growing problem, English Nature has stepped in to save them for future generations.

Peter Wakely/English Nature



Chartley Moss, Staffordshire

Extending from Shrewsbury in the south to beyond Knutsford in the north and almost as far from east to west, the Meres and Mosses comprise around 50 dips and hollows in the landscape which cover the full gamut of wetland habitats. Mainly the result of glaciation, they characteristically range from open water to reed-swamp, fen and wet pasture to mires and bogs, and as such support a great many wetland plants and animals, many restricted in their distribution. Typical among them are the bog bush-cricket, the marsh cinquefoil and the raft spider.

Yet it is this sheer variety of habitats that binds them all together – think of each like a chapter from a living story.

“These habitats are not permanent and unchanging, but are part of a dynamic process known as ‘succession’,” says Chris Walker of English Nature’s West Midlands Team. “One vegetation type slowly gives way to another as the plants themselves modify the environment.”

*Yet it is this sheer variety of habitats that binds them all together – think of each like a chapter from a living story.*

So, for example, the growth of water-lilies along the shallow margin of a lake will, over time, build up enough silt or peat to render the water suitable for reeds. These bulky plants will in turn form a swamp, accelerating the amount of organic matter settling on the lakebed and ultimately creating a fen. So the process continues until a peatland area is formed.

“The Meres and Mosses are unique in the way they demonstrate succession, and each and every site is precious because it illustrates a key part of the story.”

Because of the geographical area that they cover and their individual isolation, the Meres and Mosses are very susceptible to land use in their surrounding catchment areas and this is where the problem lies. Eutrophication – the build up of plant nutrients in the water – has been a growing issue at most sites, reducing the water quality and ultimately causing the loss of many sensitive species. The causes are thought to be the intensification of agricultural processes and sewage disposal plus certain types of recreational use of the wetlands such as angling.



Bog bush cricket

To tackle the problem at its heart, English Nature launched a Strategy for the Meres and Mosses in 1998, and to inform it, commissioned a study in partnership with the Environment Agency into the wetland sites themselves and their relationship with the surrounding catchment areas.

“The collation of information on land-use and issues will enable us to target activities to areas where they are most effective,” says Chris. “A particularly important aim is to lessen the impact of

agriculture by reducing the flow of nutrients into the Meres and Mosses.”

Because the causes of eutrophication fall outside the boundaries of the wetland sites themselves, the strategy is based both on conservation within, and working with local landowners and farmers in the catchments.

To this end, English Nature recently put in place a two-year funding programme for a Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) project officer. His role is to advise farmers on ways in which they can minimise the impact their farming operations have on the wetland habitats. In particular, he is helping them to prepare applications for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, and enabling them to make the most effective use of subsequent payments. Examples include a reduction in fertiliser use and the establishment of ‘buffer strips’ to absorb nutrients.

Says Chris, “This has been very well received by local landowners and a number of stewardship schemes are already up and running. We will continue to pursue this strategy.

“We are also in discussion with the Environment Agency, Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire County Councils and the three County Wildlife Trusts about a possible bid for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Our objective initially would be to employ a project officer to co-ordinate sources of information, to raise the profile of the Meres and Mosses, and to explore the feasibility of habitat restoration and sustainable management.”

John Mason