



The Midas touch

Turning an industrial wasteland into a wildlife haven

Return of the Native

Regenerating Hardy's
Egdon Heath

Level best

Protecting the wildlife
rich Pevensy Levels

Fire and Ice

Volcanoes and glaciers in
the heart of Leicestershire

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



Awarded for excellence

Cover picture



Cover: Mike Smith Photography/Northumbrian Water

Howdon Wetlands – wasteland to reserve thanks to Northumbrian Water, English Nature and other partners.

(see the full article on pages 10-11)

brief update

Back from the brink

Once an abundant downland species, ground pine now exists in just 20 sites in the south of England. To help redress the balance, Plantlife, in association with English Nature, has published a new addition to its back 'Back from the Brink' series aimed at farmers and landowners. *Managing your land for ground pine* provides suitable advice on helping to encourage growth in pasture, scrub, field margins and so forth.

The leaflet is available free from the English Nature Enquiry Service on 01733 455101.



Ringling the changes

A local research project into the behaviour of wading birds has been helped off the ground by funding from English Nature and other partners. The Wash Wader Ringing Group in Lincolnshire is studying the shift in turnstone feeding patterns from the traditional estuary area to Port Sutton Bridge, and what this may mean for conservation of the



Researching the habits of wading birds.

species. Others supporting the project are the RSPB, the British Trust for Ornithology and the London Power Company, which runs the Sutton Bridge Power Station.

Incentives help safeguard bird's future

A new scheme encouraging farmers to help protect rare birds is being swung into action. Backed by English Nature, the scheme will make payments available to farmers to encourage them to conserve the stone curlew - one of Britain's rarest birds.

Requiring stony ground for its nests, the species has found a natural home in the East Anglian Brecklands where some 70 per cent of the 250 remaining breeding

pairs can be found. Over the last decade, their number has more than doubled on farmland in this area, due in large part to sympathetic farmers and landowners who carefully avoid damaging the nests and young and protect them from disturbance and predators.

The scheme will be available to farmers and landowners within the Breckland Farmland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). English Nature is currently considering a proposal to include this and other Breckland SSSIs in a Special Protection Area, a designation required by the European Birds Directive to protect internationally important bird populations.

For further information contact Gareth Dalglish of English Nature's Suffolk team on 01284 762218.

English Nature questions port extension

English Nature has questioned the view of Associated British Ports (ABP) that a proposed container terminal at Dibden Bay, Southampton Water poses no risk to a number of key wildlife sites.

Comprising 42 hectares of mudflat within the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site, and another 34 hectares just outside, the site of the proposed new port is recognised as an important European waterfowl habitat. We believe that removal of foreshore by dredging and the building of port handling facilities, transport infrastructure and related developments will directly damage the site and result in the immediate loss of valuable habitat.

We are not convinced that ABP's proposed measures to offset the impact of the development are enough to avoid an adverse effect to



English Nature has queried plans for a terminal extension at Dibden Bay, Southampton Water as they may interfere with important wildlife habitats.

the integrity of the internationally protected site. The creation of a new creek behind the port development and proposals to restore an existing mudflat are experimental measures which cannot be relied upon as like for like replacement for the removal of Dibden foreshore.

We have additional concerns about the long-term erosion damage throughout the estuary of Southampton Water, which will lead

to more loss of foreshore. All of this will affect the ability of inter-tidal habitats to support the migratory waterfowl for which the SPA is designated. Disturbance of the new port would also affect the area more widely.

In advance of a Public Inquiry likely later in the year, we are currently discussing with ABP how these objections may be resolved.

Conference to tackle port development

A one-day conference entitled 'Ports, the Environment and Sustainable Development' has been organised, with English Nature among those speaking on the day. Taking place on 3 April at the London Marriot Hotel, the event is intended to help inform how port operators should develop their ports, particularly as

implementation of European environmental legislation such as the Habitats and Birds Directives is leading to a number of legal challenges.

Speaking on behalf of English Nature is Dr Tim Bines who will discuss the purpose and importance of environmental designations. Other organisations to take the

rostrum include the RSPB, the Environment Agency, DETR, the Business Council for Sustainable Development and the CBI. The Rt Hon Lord Donaldson of Lymington will chair the event.

Those wanting to find out more or to book a place should contact Frances Cumberland on 020 7787 1210.

NEWS IN SHORT

Welcome on board

A warm welcome to Professor Malcolm Hart and Dr Anne Powell who join English Nature as new council members from 1 April.

Professor Hart is a professional chartered geologist involved in geological research for over 35 years. He is a fellow of The Geological Society.

Dr Anne Powell is an ecologist and is chair and founder of The Ponds' Conservation Trust. She is also the co-founder of Pond Action and recipient of the OBE for her work.

Bats, badgers & building

The Construction Industry Environmental Forum in association with English Nature is hosting two seminars during April entitled 'Bats, badgers and the business of building'. Taking place in London (19th) and Manchester (26th), the twin events are intended to outline the responsibilities that those involved in building must adopt if they are to protect wildlife and sensitive habitats during their work.

A variety of case studies will be used to demonstrate best practice in relation to the planning, design and construction of projects. Various viewpoints will be presented including those of the regulator, planner, consultant and contractor.

For further details contact CIRIA on 020 7222 891 or www.ciria.org.uk.

For peat's sake

As the first rays of Spring sunshine appear, thoughts turn to getting that garden into shape and planting plans for the new season. This year, please help to save peat bogs by trying those composts not made from peat - a range of alternatives are available from garden centres. England's few remaining bogs - unique and increasingly precious - are being damaged by cutting.

brief update

NEWS IN SHORT

LIFE conference success

'Partnerships for Practical Conservation', the three-day conference held in February to discuss the New Forest LIFE Project, has been announced a success with the attendance of representatives from over 80 countries. In opening the conference, Professor David Norman, Acting Chairman for English Nature, described the New Forest as "a jewel in the crown for nature conservation in the UK".



English Nature Acting Chairman Professor David Norman (centre) discusses the New Forest LIFE Project with Forestry Commission Ecologist, Jonathan Spencer (right) and English Nature Conservation Officer, Diana Westerhoff (left).

'Disappointment' at road decision

English Nature has expressed extreme disappointment at the decision of the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) to approve proposed road and rail schemes around Hastings. This would damage Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), largely within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A number of ancient woodland sites and the habitats of species of European importance, including dormouse and great crested newt, would also be affected.

Flora power

The second edition of Flora English Nature has just been published, outlining some of the key botanical projects that English Nature has been involved in.

For a copy, contact the English Nature Enquiry Service on 01733 455101.

Species Recovery Programme 10th Anniversary Conference



P. Wakeley/English Nature

Many threatened species such as the starfruit (left) will be up for discussion at the Species Recovery Programme Conference in December.

English Nature invites you to attend the 10th anniversary Species Recovery Programme conference, which takes place between 5-7 December 2001 at the Hayes Conference Centre at Swanwick, Derbyshire. Perhaps the most important date in the English Nature calendar, the conference will discuss key successes over the past decade and will help establish the blueprint for biodiversity action over the next ten years.

In 1991, English Nature began the programme to restore, maintain or enhance populations of plants and animals in severe decline or threat of extinction in England. The initiative has since become the key vehicle for delivery of Biodiversity Action Plan targets and priority species conservation in England. The SRP, through its use of partnership and the development of novel techniques, has also influenced species conservation across Europe.

As well as work to date and methods for the future, the conference will also cover current issues such as habitat management conflicts, translocation and invasive species through interactive workshops.

If you would like to attend, or require any more information about the conference, please contact Trudie Mills either by e-mail at: trudie.mills@english-nature.org.uk or telephone 01733 455112.



Take a leaf from this book

As part of our plan to put nature conservation at the heart of the sustainable development agenda, English Nature has formed a partnership with Green Futures magazine.

Green Futures focuses on the positive environmental, economic and social solutions that are being put into place in the UK today. Each issue contains a mix of opinion, detailed case studies, and features, along with lots of practical examples from the cutting edge of sustainable good practice in business, government and education. The magazine has recently covered subjects such as environmental risk; human sustainability issues such as disability and work-life balance, and the role of science in the search for a sustainable society.

Green Futures is published by Forum for the Future, the sustainable development charity directed by Jonathon Porritt and Sara Parkin. It comes out six times a year, and is available by subscription only at £19 for individuals, £27 for non-profit organisations, and £34 for businesses. For information on how to subscribe, please call Green Futures Subscriptions on 01223 564334. (Please quote 'English Nature Magazine' with your order.)

NFU's field of dreams

This year's NFU President's Awards produced a crop of winners, not least for the Biodiversity Award. Sponsored by English Nature, it is designed to show that farming and conservation can work hand in hand without undercutting profitability.

The awards were held alongside the NFU's AGM at the Hilton Hotel in London and were the third time that English Nature has lent its support to the Biodiversity Award. By doing so, it seeks to highlight the contribution that farmers can make to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), and through the prize money totalling £10,000, help winners to carry out conservation projects to boost characteristic local wildlife on their farms. After a closely fought round of regional and national heats, Robert Kynaston of Great Woolaston in Shropshire was announced the overall winner for a range of conservation initiatives on his 242 acre farm. Ian McNicol and Farm Manager, Ross Haddow of the Stody Estate in Norfolk, meanwhile, received the runners-up award.

Presenting the awards was English Nature Council Member Anne Kelaart who said, "This year's finalists clearly demonstrate the great contribution that farmers can make to boosting wildlife ... whilst running viable and productive businesses."

English Nature is looking forward to working closely with NFU to develop the award and other wildlife-friendly farming initiatives.

Runner-up Stody Estate, Norfolk



NFU



NFU

Winner Great Woolaston, Shropshire

Robert Kynaston (above and left) receiving his award from English Nature Council Member Anne Kelaart

Robert Kynaston has a 242-acre mixed farm mainly specialising in dairy with some arable where he has created grassy field margins for hares and farmland birds such as yellowhammers, lapwings and skylarks. He has also undertaken hedge-laying and coppicing to make wildlife corridors between woods and pools on the farm and worked closely with the RSPB on its farmland bird study.

"Conservation is something I've felt strongly about for a long time and over

the years I've cleared out pools, planted trees and so forth," says Robert.

"Five years ago I got into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and as such was able to put two and six metre margins around my fields. As a result of the RSPB farmland bird study I am also now leaving cereal stubble over winter for the birds to feed on. I actually find it very useful being a member of FWAG since I take much inspiration from their newsletter.

"It's nice to show that the work is having a beneficial effect. It really is possible for a farm to be profitable and do conservation work as well."

Covering some 4,000 acres, Stody Estate falls within three county wildlife sites and has five miles of the River Glaven, an SSSI, within its boundaries. It also has a number of Countryside Stewardship Scheme initiatives underway, the first of which was started about five years ago.

Conservation work done to date includes increasing the floral diversity of 80 ha of grassland through reducing stocking rates and avoiding the use of fertilisers and sprays, restoring important link hedges and planting 12 km of new ones, and creating beetle banks in larger fields.

Farm Manager, Ross Haddow on the Stody Estate, which has an extensive mix of wildlife habitats.

Grass margins are also a feature of most fields and woodland is actively managed for the benefit of wildlife.

"The work we have been doing is quite extensive and as a result we're hoping to encourage a number of species to use the habitats created. These include birds such as the grey partridge, barn owl and tree sparrow plus mammals such as the brown hare, water vole and water shrew."

The finalists are still considering those projects, which the award money will go towards. Both, however, have expressed an interest in developing the educational value of the farms for local schools through walks, etc.

Dorset heath still accounts for some 11 per cent of the remaining lowland heathland in Western Europe.



The return of the Native Dorset Heath

The extensive backdrop to many of his novels, Thomas Hardy much lamented the decline of Egdon Heath. Now English Nature is helping to turn back the clock with a programme of regeneration and recreation, removing invasive species so that native ones can flourish and re-introducing time-honoured land management techniques that will be key to the heath's sustainability.

Immortalised in classics such as *Return of the Native* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Egdon Heath characterises Hardy Country. Swathes of lowland heathland, the area maintains a wild atmosphere and rich and diverse combination of wildlife despite its close proximity to towns such

as Dorchester and Bournemouth. Even before Hardy's time, however, lowland heathland was in decline at the hands of 'agri-improvement'. The turning over of heath into fields and conifer plantations plus road building and urban development have all turned what was once a largely unbroken area of 40,000 ha into a series of fragments amounting to around 7,000 ha. The lapse of management practices such as grazing has also taken its toll and around 20 per cent of the area left is now 'scrubbed up' with invasive species.

Even so, Dorset heath still accounts for some 11 per cent of the remaining lowland heathland in Western Europe.

Restoring Hardy's Egdon Heath Project is the largest of the initiatives to get off the ground under the Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage programme, a £25 million plus scheme encompassing around 20 other initiatives, and which is being supported by English Nature and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Work started on the £3.75 million five-year improvement project in October 2000 and involves the efforts of a large number of partners in addition to English Nature. Among them are the RSPB, the Dorset Wildlife Trust, The National Trust, The Herpetological Conservation Trust, Forest Enterprise, four borough councils, Dorset County Council, the Ministry of Defence and Holton Lee, a charity for the disabled. So far it has focused on removing large areas of pernicious species, such as Rhododendron and Gaultheria and opening up self-seeded areas of birch,

sand lizard, Dartford warbler, wood lark and sand wasp.

"The ecological benefits of this are clear," says Brad Tooze, the Project Manager who is employed by English Nature to co-ordinate the project locally. "By taking the heath back to its former glory, we are safeguarding a rare and important European landscape and habitat. More than that, we're also restoring a cultural landscape for the public. To many people the heathland is Dorset."

It is hoped that by October 2005 over 1,000 ha of heathland will have been restored, 15,000 ha given over to new grazing and a further 100 ha created.

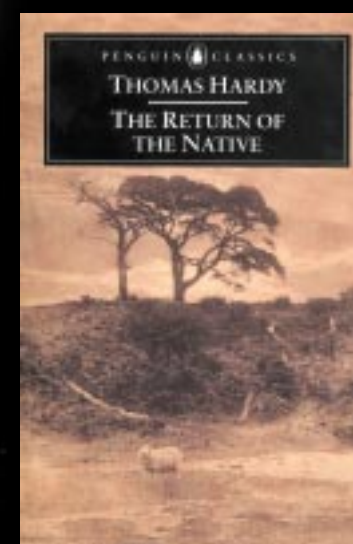
"We're really trying to make this count at every level," adds Brad. "Much of the work is being undertaken by local contractors on behalf of project partners



A team from The Herpetological Conservation Trust clear scrub on Town Common.

willow and pine, which threaten to overwhelm the heath. Fencing and cattle grids will be introduced, and farmers and landowners will be encouraged through incentive schemes to graze their livestock on the heath. This will keep species that tend to dominate, such as purple moor grass, in check. The re-introduction of livestock, which are a traditional part of the heathland ecosystem, will allow native species such as yellow centaury and marsh gentian to regain their once extensive distribution across the heath. Other species to benefit from the programme are the smooth snake,

so there is a real benefit for the local economy. We're also keen to promote public benefit and are getting the public involved with walks, open days and so forth." Interpretation boards are being put up to promote a greater appreciation of the heathland habitat. One particular scheme involves the erection of a boardwalk and viewing platform to promote disabled access. "The area also has a rich archaeological value and restoring and managing the heath in this way will maintain their prominence in the open landscape and prevent root damage from scrub encroachment."



"Under the general name of 'Egdon Heath', which has been given to the sombre scene of the story, are united or typified heaths of various real names, to the number of at least a dozen; these being virtually one in character and aspect, though their original unity, or partial unity, is now somewhat disguised by intrusive strips and slices brought under the plough with varying degrees of success, or planted to woodland."

Thomas Hardy, *Return of the Native*, 1895

Level best

Famous as the landing place of William the Conqueror, the Pevensey Levels in East Sussex are also a nationally important stronghold for rare and endangered wetland species. English Nature, the Environment Agency and local landowners and partners are now half way through a flagship project to help combat the effects of water drainage and meet Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) targets.

Stretching over some 3,500 ha between Eastbourne and Bexhill, the Levels were a shallow bay at the time of the invasion, only later to become marshland thanks to the encroachment of a shingle spit. Now criss-crossed by drainage ditches, the more modern role of the area has been as summer pasture for local livestock, with flooding during winter helping wetland wildlife to flourish.

The Pevensey Levels are a prime example of coastal and floodplain grazing marshes, a national BAP priority habitat. They are also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ramsar site. The ditches support a rich variety of nationally rare and scarce aquatic plants, such as sharp-leaved pondweed and greater water-parsnip, as well as nationally rare invertebrates, such as snails, water beetles, leeches, dragonflies, and the bigger of two populations of fen raft spiders in the UK. Wintering birds such as the redshank and lapwing depend heavily on the site too.

Pump draining of the Levels over the last 40 years, however, has altered the land use, dramatically lowering water levels in the ditches and posing a threat to the diversity of plants and animals.

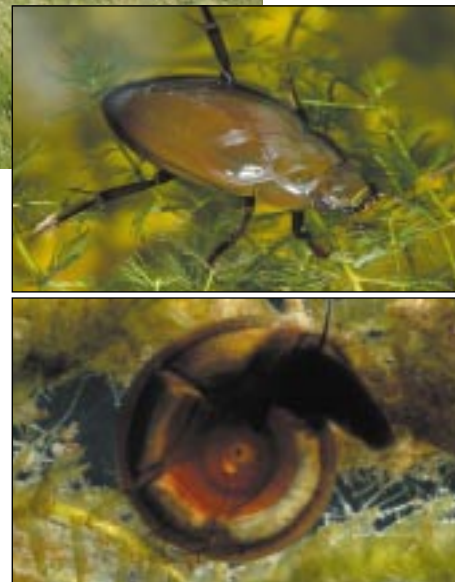


By encouraging local landowners to sign up to English Nature's Wildlife Enhancement Scheme (WES), the traditional practices of ditch clearance and grazing are slowly being re-introduced for the benefit of the landscape and wildlife. But it is a complicated business to gain the compliance of over 150 individuals, and the WES alone cannot tackle the fundamental issue of water level control.

Through raising water levels, and associated habitat management, the £200,000 two-year flagship project aims to restore 900 ha of the grazing marshes, representing nearly 10 per cent of the UK BAP target for this habitat. In addition it will benefit a range of BAP priority species and meet Sussex BAP and WES objectives. "The amount of landowner uptake that the WES can achieve has been constrained by the absence of these water controls," says Will Simonson, habitats co-ordinator of English Nature's Biodiversity Programme and chair of the project's steering committee. "Putting

them in place will have obvious benefits for wildlife, giving more landowners access to the higher tier WES payments."

While English Nature is providing most of the funding for the project, the Environment Agency has



Raising the water level for wildlife. Those to benefit from the flagship project include the great silver water beetle (top) and shining ram's-horn snail.

employed a project officer to implement the engineering work on the ground and will take on maintenance of several structures in the future.

"Over the last year, 10 new sluices have been built, which will raise water levels on around 400 ha of the surrounding land," says Phil Griffiths, Environment Agency conservation team leader for Sussex. "This kind of work is very important and we hope it will encourage similar projects to be set up elsewhere."

"In addition to the water control work, this final year of the project will see an increased focus on the conservation and monitoring of the wildlife," continues Will, "particularly species such as the fen raft spider, shining ram's-horn snail and great silver water beetle."

Against the backdrop of Pevensey Castle, the battle now is to counter the effects of water drainage on the Levels.

K. Hewitt/English Nature

R.S. Key/English Nature

R.S. Key/English Nature

Fire and ice

Volcanoes? Glaciers? It's hard to believe that the East Midlands was once a hotbed of volcanic and glacial activity. That is until you visit Charnwood Lodge where the power of fire and ice is spelt out in hard volcanic rock. Fitting then that this should join a select band of National Nature Reserves (NNRs) designated by English Nature purely on the strength of their geological interest.

Rising some 250 metres out of the Leicestershire countryside, the volcanically derived hardrock landscape of Charnwood Forest dramatically contrasts with the gently rolling, rural character of the land around it. Within it lies the wild moorland and windswept tors of Charnwood Lodge, long designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its nationally important geology. Towards the end of last year Charnwood Lodge received further recognition of its geological value with the designation

of the site as a National Nature Reserve (NNR). In fact, it has something of an international reputation for its geological features – across the 80 ha site are stark, glaciated landforms plus some of the oldest volcanic rocks in England. These graphically illustrate the changing environment of Leicestershire over millions of years.

"Landforms like this are very limited in distribution across the UK," says Steve Clifton, a conservation officer with English Nature's East Midlands team,

"and here it's easy to appreciate its violent and fiery past. The crags and tors that make up the Charnwood skyline are also evidence of the glaciers that once covered this part of England."

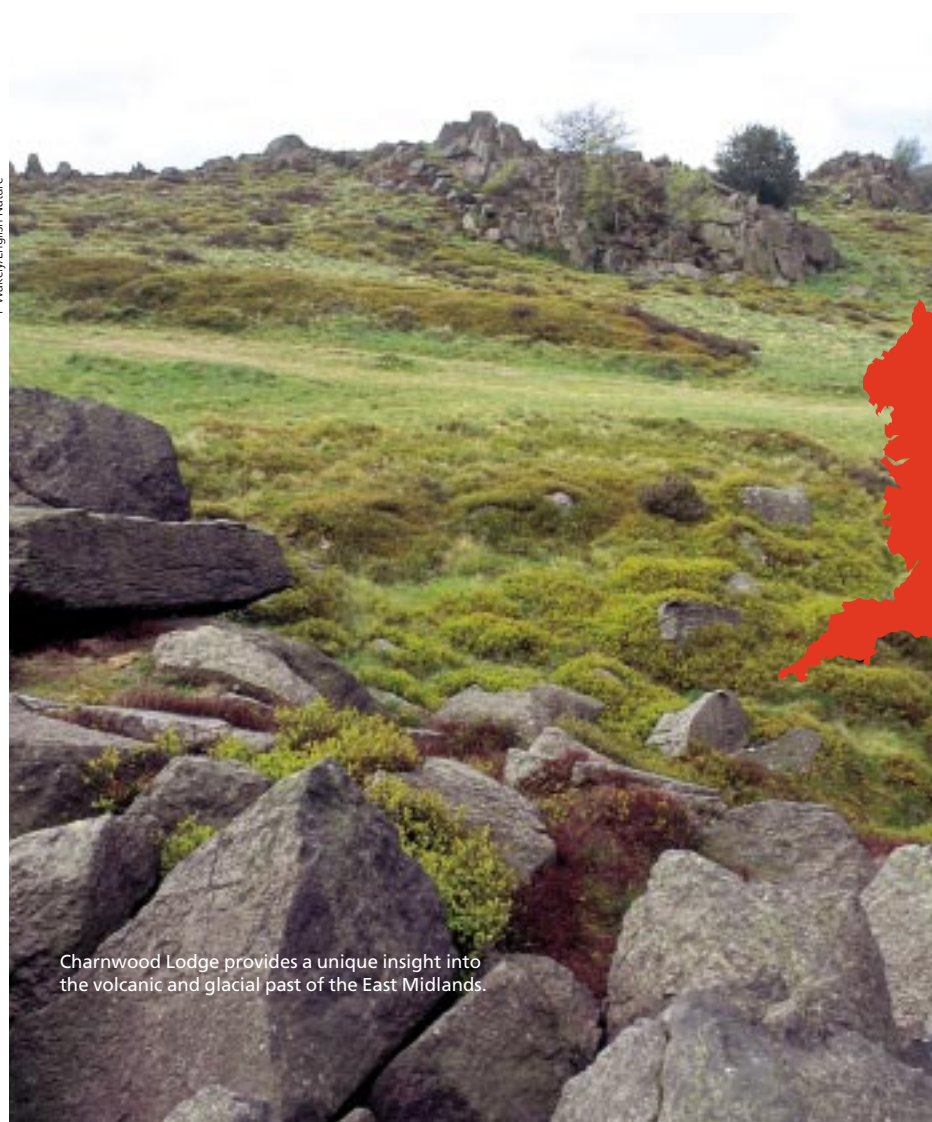
Owned and managed by the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, the reserve has long been valued by local people for its wild heathland and woods, and indeed has some important species such as curlew, bilberry and rare lichens. "Its geological value has been totally beyond most people's experience though," adds Jenny Harris, a conservation officer for the Trust. "Its recent designation as an NNR has brought that to a much wider audience than the geologists alone."

This is totally in tune with English Nature's Earth Heritage Strategy, 'The past is the key to the future', launched last year, in part to create a stronger appreciation of geology among the public. Information boards detailing the formation of the rocks have now gone up and while there isn't open access to the site as a whole, a footpath crosses it, and there are plans for guided geological walks in the future.

English Nature will now be working even more closely with the Trust under the Reserves Enhancement Scheme, providing advice and financial assistance, as it already does on many of the Trust's other reserves. This will mean jointly writing a work programme to manage and enhance existing low-impact methods of managing the site, such as grazing cattle during the summer months.

Adds Steve, "It helps keep vegetation off the rocks! Particularly important now that we are drawing public interest to the geological riches of the site."

For further information about Charnwood Lodge NNR, contact



P. Wakeley/English Nature

Charnwood Lodge provides a unique insight into the volcanic and glacial past of the East Midlands.

The Midas touch

Turning lead into gold may be the stuff of legend, but a collaboration of Northumbrian Water, English Nature and other key partners has helped to do just that in environmental terms, making a contaminated industrial wasteland into an oasis for wetland birds and wildlife.

Set in the midst of a sewage treatment works, Howdon Wetlands shows that wildlife can thrive in an industrial environment.



Already Howdon Wetlands is attracting a rich diversity of wildlife, as witnessed by former Environment Minister Chris Mullin and others involved in the recreation project.

Northpoint Media

Officially opened on 11 December by the then Environment Minister Chris Mullin, Howdon Wetlands is a 5 ha nature reserve situated alongside Northumbrian Water's £70 million secondary and tertiary sewage treatment works in North Tyneside. The reserve is the result of the organisation's biodiversity plan in which English Nature along with North Tyneside Council, Northumberland Wildlife Trust, RSPB, BTO, and WWT have played a key role.

"We have an understanding on all of our sites of the importance of conservation," explains Dr. Chris Spray, Northumbrian Water's Environmental Director. "Therefore, when developing a site, there are often opportunities to enhance the conservation

elements of the area. Wildlife surveys carried out before the construction at the Howdon works identified opportunities to enhance the area's biodiversity. We therefore approached interested parties such as English Nature to look into the idea of creating a new wetland beside the plant."

"We were one of a number of consultees during the planning process, and actively supported the development," says Dr Dave Mitchell, English Nature Conservation Officer. "The success of the project owes much to the partnership between North Tyneside Council, who were very keen to enhance the site, and Northumbrian Water who also have a good conservation policy."

The result was the creation of new wetlands, specifically designed to attract waders, wildfowl, breeding terns and amphibians like the smooth newt.

In addition, the site could also attract a wide range of butterfly species, and other bird species such as the grey partridge and reed buntings. The grassland provides a rare opportunity to see and hear skylarks singing in the centre of an industrial area, and kestrels regularly hunt overhead looking for voles and mice.

"The site is protected by a water-filled ditch to deter foxes, and in spring the gravel islands will provide nesting sites," adds Dave. "Swallows and martins will hunt for insects over the waters in summer. The construction has two

"The site is protected by a water-filled ditch to deter foxes, and in spring the gravel islands will provide nesting sites"

sluice systems to control the water level. In the autumn the level can be lowered to expose mud to attract birds migrating along the Tyne Valley. Redshank, curlew, lapwing, dunlin, common sandpiper and golden plover are already regular visitors. The site will also be a winter shelter for turnstone, snipe, oystercatcher and teal, whilst other species such as herons, cormorants and a variety of gull species can already be seen."

Although still very young, an already impressive variety of wildlife has been seen within the habitat, and a double tier hide, with sweeping views of the Tyne, has been built to allow schools, bird groups and other organisations to observe the wildlife.

The site will continue to be managed by Northumbrian Water. English Nature will, however, maintain its links with the site as a partner on the

BEFORE

AFTER

Turning lead into gold

The land upon which the wetlands have been created was previously contaminated industrial wasteland, in a state of decay. Drilling into the ground discovered that the site was loaded with brick, rubble and, most worryingly, asbestos.

"Some parts of the site were pretty atrocious from a naturalist's point of view," explains English Nature Conservation Officer, Dr Dave Mitchell. "For example, rubbish and toxic waste had been dumped in the area during the 1950s. However, other parts of the site had some existing wildlife value including rough grassland, scrub and waterpools.

"It was clear that there was an opportunity to develop a new series of wetland habitats and so, as part of Northumbrian Water's building project, 16,000 lorry loads of clay, which otherwise would have been transported out of the area to landfill sites, were used on site to cap and reclaim the nearby riverside land, creating two lakes, islands, small ponds, wildflower grasslands and scrub."



High as a kite

Persecuted to extinction in England by the end of the 19th century, an ongoing re-introduction programme has led to a rapid recovery in red kite numbers according to a recent survey carried out by English Nature in partnership with the RSPB and others.

Since the programme began just over a decade ago, the red kite has captured the imagination of people who have seen the bird in their local countryside. Some kites have become regular visitors to villages and small towns and, in an echo of medieval times when kites were common scavengers in our city streets, recent sightings over central London have been eagerly reported in the national press.



Poisoning is a major threat to the fledgling populations of red kite in England.

Starting in 1989, young kites were taken from nests in Spain before being transported to the Chilterns in southern England and released into the wild. Following the success of work in the area, young kites have also been released at sites in the East Midlands, beginning in 1995, and on the Harewood Estate in Yorkshire ❶ from 1999. Now part of English Nature's Species Recovery Programme, the initiative is testament to a close partnership



© Carter/English Nature

with the RSPB and local support from the likes of Forest Enterprise and Yorkshire Water.

"Last summer a full breeding survey was carried out to find out how the kite was faring across the UK," says Ian Carter, Red Kite Project Coordinator. "The results for England have shown a strong growth in numbers with as many as 112 breeding pairs in the Chilterns ❸, 16 in the Midlands and the first breeding pair for well over 100 years in Yorkshire.

"The kite does not have specialist habitat requirements and in the long-term we want to see the species restored to its former status as one of our most widespread and familiar birds," adds Ian. "Thanks to the support of volunteers, farmers and gamekeepers, we now have an extensive informal network that helps us to monitor the progress of the re-introduced populations.

On a less encouraging note, monitoring work, including the use of long-range radio-transmitters attached to released birds, has shown

To help kickstart red kite distribution in England, birds were first brought from Spain. Now existing communities are being used to establish new ones.

that the kite still faces a number of serious threats, including shooting and the use of illegal poison baits.

Last year in the Midlands ❷, three recently fledged kites died as a result of feeding on carcasses laced with poison. This was the worst case of poisoning since the re-introduction programme began, highlighting the fact that there is still a small minority of people willing to flout the law regardless of the impact on wildlife. "We are using the work on kites to raise awareness of this issue and the unacceptable threat that poison baits still pose to a range of native wildlife," continues Ian. "Another problem faced by scavengers is secondary poisoning when feeding on rats killed by highly toxic rodenticides. Although these poisons must be contained within secure bait containers, poisoned rats sometimes die out in the open, and this has resulted in the death of a number of kites during the past two years. Whilst these threats are not currently preventing kite populations from becoming established in England, they are slowing the rate of increase and reducing the bird's ability to spread into new areas."



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