



The Upland Challenge

A vision for the future

Go wild in the garden

English Nature on show at the NEC

When nature calls

The Enquiry Service uncovered

Access for all

Opening up NNRs for everyone

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.

For further information contact any of our offices. English Nature's National Office is: Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA Tel: 01733 455000 Fax: 01733 568834

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 photographer: Andy Brown/English Nature

English Nature's vision for the future – a mosaic of upland habitats, in this case in the South Pennines.

(see the full article on pages 6–7)

brief update

New Chair for English Nature



Martin Doughty.

English Nature has welcomed the appointment of new Chair Martin Doughty. Previously Chair of the Peak District National Park Authority, the Association of National Park Authorities and Leader of Derbyshire County Council,

he will be picking up the baton from English Nature's Acting Chairman, David Norman, in May.

"We are delighted that Martin Doughty will be taking over the helm," said Mr Norman. "We very much look forward to working with him, and he will bring to English Nature a wide range of experience." Among the valuable assets that he will be bringing to the role will be an insight into the pressures on wildlife in the uplands – particularly timely

considering the increasing attention that English Nature is focusing on this area at the moment.

"I am looking forward to working with English Nature, who have an increasingly important role to play in conserving England's wildlife and countryside," added Councillor Doughty. I have enjoyed working with them as a partner and I relish the challenge of taking on this leading role within the organisation."

Best of three

Plans for English Nature to stage an 'open shop' for the farming community this summer have had to be postponed following the cancellation of the Royal Show due to the Foot and Mouth crisis.

The focal point of the farming calendar, the July event annually attracts some 170,000 visitors and was to be

the launchpad for the Five Point Plan for Wildlife Friendly Farming – a joint initiative between English Nature and the National Farmers Union. Providing farmers with practical, low-cost methods of farming with – not against – the environment, the Plan will now be re-scheduled for launch later in the year.

Despite this setback, English Nature will still be attending the CLA Game Fair, due to take place between 27th and 29th July at Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire. Another massive event – around 125,000 are due to pass through its doors – the fair will provide ample opportunity to discuss issues of interest to landowners from legislation to ways of managing meadows and woodland for wildlife.

English Nature will also be making a very public appearance at the BBC's Gardener's World Live Show 2001 in Birmingham from 13th to 17th June (see article on page 8).

For further details, contact Catherine Prasad on 01733 455450.

Cliff hanger of an outcome



The Birling Gap, natural coastal protection.

English Nature and the National Trust have secured the future of Birling Gap, a nationally important geological site on the East Sussex coast, which was under threat from the proposed building of sea defences. The site forms part of the spectacular Seaford to Beachy Head Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Following an eight-day Public Inquiry held last July, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions decided against the sea defences, part of a

coastal protection scheme originally put forward by a group of residents living in the hamlet of Birling Gap. The decision by English Nature, the National Trust and Sussex Downs Conservation Board to contest the plan quickly brought it into the public eye.

The residents' concern related to cottages on the cliff top, which would eventually be lost to the sea due to the continued threat of coastal erosion. The construction of a barrier at the foot of the cliff, they claimed, would have slowed the erosion and

prolonged the lifetime of the buildings.

"Our view was that the defences would not, anyway, have saved the row of cottages on the cliff top and would only have served to damage the unique site," said Senior Conservation Officer, Bob Edgar who gave evidence for English Nature at the Inquiry.

"Allowing areas like Birling Gap to erode and maintain beaches is essential to help the coast protect us naturally from sea level rise. The cliffs at Birling Gap are not only a beautiful part of the local landscape, but are also nationally important for the study and understanding of the Ice Ages.

Following the outcome, the National Trust, which owns land and property on the cliff, offered a package of measures aimed at supporting residents affected by the erosion.

On a wing and a prayer

A colony of lesser horseshoe bats have eighty-six year old Arthur Arrowsmith to thank, after he intervened when vandals threatened their wartime bunker home. English Nature has now presented him with the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Award, recognising that his efforts were above and beyond the call of duty.

A retired electrician, Mr Arrowsmith first came across the colony six years ago in an old Wellington bomber control centre, which forms part of a wartime airfield, now Bearley Bushes SSSI near Stratford-upon-Avon. More recently involved in coppicing the site as part of an English Nature management plan,

he noticed that the bunker was coming in for serious vandal attacks, which threatened to scare the bats away. After raising the alarm, English Nature put up an exterior breeze block skin to protect the brickwork while Mr Arrowsmith donned a welding mask and created a steel door to bar entry to the building.

NEWS IN SHORT

Moth Night

Moths will be under the spotlight this summer with the 3rd National Moth Night due to take place on 11th August. Designed to stimulate interest in an often unappreciated creature, the event is hoping to encourage people across the country to get out and spot the many different species normally hidden under cover of darkness. Those hoping to organise local events to coincide can get promotional packs by sending a large SAE to National Moth Night, 1 Clive Cottage, London Road, Allostock, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 9LT or going to the official website at www.atroposuk.co.uk.

Greenham Common – update

West Berkshire County Council has now secured the whole of Greenham and Crookham Commons under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, ensuring the ongoing management of the 500 hectare area for the next ten years at least. As mentioned in January's edition, the Council – with the help of English Nature – has turned what was formerly a US Nuclear Air Base into a haven for local species such as the dartford warbler and woodlark. This involved a complete re-modelling of the site. As part of the management programme the area is now being grazed extensively. A plan to purchase silos adjoining the site is also under discussion and if agreed, will provide the final piece of the jigsaw.

NNR Events leaflet

The NNR Walks and Events leaflet for 2001 was due to be published ready for the May edition of English Nature Magazine. Due to Foot and Mouth Disease, we are now postponing the publication. We will review the situation in June to see whether we can publish a leaflet ready for the July edition of the Magazine. Events listings on the website will also be delayed.

brief update

Nutty not to

Anyone with an interest in species recovery is being invited to join in The Great Nut Hunt, a nationwide survey to assess the size and range of dormouse populations in England and Wales. Co-ordinated by English Nature and Mammals Trust UK with support from CenterParcs, the survey is due to be launched this September. Members of the public are encouraged to 'go nutty' in the countryside, looking for evidence of the small and rare mammal, such as hazel nuts which bear their distinctive teeth marks. Free survey packs and a magnifying glass will be available from Mammals Trust UK in the summer. Resulting information should be returned by the end of January for checking by the 'Chief Nutter'.

For further information, see the official website, www.greatnuthunt.org.uk.

Building with nature

It has been some time in the planning, but it seems that the gap between the interests of wildlife and developers is about to be bridged, courtesy of the Development and Wildlife Advisory Service.

Due to be piloted in the South East of England, the organisation is the product of talks between English Nature, the Environment Agency, West Sussex County Council and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), which is providing the largest share of the financial backing. Following in the footsteps of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), the body will seek to work with and establish a common agenda between developers and those concerned with nature conservation.

"We want to demonstrate not just that sensitive development and

the conservation of wildlife need not always be opposed," says Steve Berry, Special Projects Officer for English Nature's Sussex and Surrey Team, "but that there are always opportunities to make the most of existing habitat features and to reduce the incidental demands on the natural environment, which poorly planned developments involve. In addition, new habitat can sometimes be created.

"The new service will establish good practice examples of what can be achieved on a voluntary basis to provide a secure home for wildlife as well as our increasing housing needs."

A steering group made up of representatives from the industry, conservation and planning sectors will provide support for a project officer, employed by SEEDA, for a year starting this summer. A review of the pilot

project's success will then be undertaken.

A key resource for the project will be the recently published title, 'Developing Naturally – a handbook for incorporating the natural environment into planning and development'. The preparation of this work, by Mike Oxford of North Somerset District Council, was part funded by English Nature.

The long-term hope is that every county will eventually have a Development and Wildlife Advisory Service, paid for by developers in the same way that the services of FWAG staff are bought by farmers and landowners.

For further information, please contact Steve Berry of English Nature's Sussex and Surrey team in Lewes on 01273 476595.

Partners in action



Ungrazed chalk flora on Mount Caburn, Lewes Downs NNR, Sussex.

A major step towards securing the future of the rolling chalk

grassland characteristic of much of Southern England and some parts of Europe will be taken later this year with the presentation of research findings at an international conference.

'Chalk Grassland – Networks for Action' is an EU funded Inter-Regional (INTERREG) Project, and for the last two years has been working towards developing a partnership of European bodies in order that

they might share information and experience on the conservation of chalk grassland. Among them are English Nature, the Sussex Downs Conservation Board, the Countryside Agency, Sussex Wildlife Trust and the University of Hertfordshire. From France is the Conservatoire des Sites Naturels de Picardie.

The final conference will be the culmination of the findings and will be split between a venue

in Sussex on Wednesday 10th October and another in Picardie, France on a date yet to be specified.

Those interested in either attending the conference or finding out more about the work being done should contact Eleanor Togut, INTERREG Project Officer, Sussex Downs Conservation Board on 01323 871095 or e-mail etogut@southdowns-aonb.gov.uk.

Time for a new way forward?

A review of how farmland and the countryside are managed, and how public money is invested in them, has been called for by English Nature and the other countryside bodies the Environment Agency and Countryside Agency. The emphasis should be less on production and more on sustainable agriculture with farmers given the means and support to make the transition.

The recent outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease has been devastating for the farming industry, and has had serious effects for many other people and rural businesses. It has also stimulated a debate about the food chain, and the role of agriculture. English Nature and its sister organisations see a need for radical changes in farming practices to deliver more environmental and other benefits and is calling for farmers to be paid for this. The aim should be to produce high quality, affordable food while meeting environmental and animal welfare standards, protecting soil, air and water quality, improving biodiversity and enhancing the character of our landscapes.

"The farming industry is special in that its practices are inextricably linked to the health of the countryside," said English Nature Acting Chief Executive Caroline Wood. "We want to see public money used to support environmentally sensitive farming and rural development, rather than being linked solely to production. We need concerted action by farmers, retailers, government, environmentalists and regulators, all working together towards the same vision. We are keen to play our part in the transformation needed to meet the expectations that people have of a modern and responsible farming and food industry."



A chance to reconsider future grazing systems.

To achieve this new vision of farming, a number of measures have been put forward:

- Radical reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) to switch funds from production to the 'second pillar of CAP' – agri-environment schemes, organic farming and rural development.
- The UK Government to exercise its ability, under the current CAP rules, to switch funds to this second pillar.
- The expansion and integration of MAFF's farm business advice with environmental advice.
- An expanded training scheme to equip farmers with necessary new skills.
- Investment in farming to change the practices that are damaging the countryside through pollution or over-intensive use of the land.
- Ensure that farming is carried out to basic environmental and animal welfare standards.

Furthermore, the restocking of livestock farms affected by Foot and Mouth Disease might provide a chance to ensure the

environmental sustainability of future grazing systems.

For further information, contact the English Nature Press Office on 01733 455190.

NNRs start to re-open

English Nature has begun re-opening to visitors some of the National Nature Reserves (NNRs) closed as a consequence of the Foot and Mouth outbreak. Fieldwork halted for the same reasons is also starting to be resumed outside of infected areas whilst continuing to follow strict disinfecting procedures.

"Although most reserves remain closed, we have started to identify those wildlife sites that the public can visit where the risks of spreading Foot and Mouth Disease are absolutely minimal," says Andrew Brown, English Nature's Director of Operations. "We want to provide the public with some controlled and safe access to the countryside without creating further risks to the farming community."

For full listings, contact the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100.

Considered as some of our last remaining wilderness areas, the uplands of England are, nevertheless, suffering from economic crisis, social change and environmental degradation, further exacerbated by the recent Foot and Mouth epidemic. English Nature puts forward a vision for the future and the action needed now to achieve it.



Heather thrives when grazing is low, but is lost when overgrazed (right hand slope). Skiddaw, Cumbria.

Peter Wakeley



Golden Plover chick

A. Brown

Despite their rugged beauty, the uplands have been shaped by centuries of human activity. Once heavily forested, they are now dominated by grass and heather moorland with a rich variety of flora and fauna. So important is their biodiversity that almost a quarter of the uplands is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Yet at the same time they remain closely linked with local agriculture, economies and communities. The main pressures on upland wildlife are heavy livestock grazing made worse by the unco-ordinated management of common land, inappropriate management of some grouse moors, increased access and recreation, climate change, and atmospheric pollution.

English Nature has published a report in which it identifies the priority actions that are needed to deal with each of these problems and ensure a sustainable future for the uplands. “Our vision for the uplands is a mosaic of more diverse habitats supporting characteristic wildlife and at the same time environmentally sustainable agriculture, economies and communities,” says Dr David Townshend, Upland Team Manager and co-author of the report. “To realise this we must work with those who use and manage the land to maintain, restore and enhance the wildlife and natural features of the English uplands.

“Crucial to the future biodiversity of the uplands is sympathetic agriculture,” he continues. “There has been significant recent reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) designed to promote integrated rural development. However, we need a greater shift of funds from agricultural production support to rural development and environmental measures. Further changes in policy are needed to ensure support for farmers who are willing to protect and enhance the wildlife value of the uplands, with clear signals that farmers whose practices damage the environment will not receive public financial support.”

The Upland Challenge

In the report, English Nature sets out a number of recommendations for action.

The main pressures on upland wildlife are:

Agriculture

Wildlife in the uplands is intimately linked to livestock farming, but is sustained only through sensitive management. CAP subsidies based on number of livestock encourage more stock than is environmentally sustainable and, as a result, many hill areas are overgrazed. There is also a crisis in the upland farming industry with many farmers struggling to retain viable upland businesses. To achieve sustainable land management for the uplands and maintain viable upland communities, there is a need to:

- target agri-environment schemes at biodiversity priorities,
- reform the sheepmeat and beef regimes with area-based payments conditional on practical environmental standards,



Spring Gentiana

C. McCarthy

- enforce the overgrazing rules more effectively, and
- promote the implementation of the Rural Development Programme.

Common land

Tackling the issue of livestock management on common land is made more difficult because there is currently no legal requirement to co-ordinate the management of commons. Management committees, with management plans and registers of activities, could co-ordinate livestock grazing on common land and ensure that it is environmentally sustainable. This requires:

- new legislation for common land.

Grouse moors

The other major land use in the uplands of England is the management of grouse moors for shooting. This has had the very real benefit of saving heather moorland from post-war afforestation and intensive agricultural intensification. However, some management practices have negative impacts on wildlife, such as intensive burning, drainage and illegal predator control. To deliver many of the nature conservation targets for upland heathland, there is a need to:

- promote environmentally sustainable grouse moor management, and
- enforce the law to end persecution of birds of prey.

Public access and recreation

Increased access to open land in the uplands, provided for in the new Countryside and Rights of Way Act, must be managed to prevent damage to wildlife features, for example, the disturbance of breeding birds. To be effective there is a need for:

- advice and demonstration of managing land for people and wildlife.

Climate change and atmospheric pollution

The wider environmental pressures from climate change and atmospheric pollution, much of which results from human activities away from the uplands, must be tackled at all levels from individual action through to government policy and international agreements.

SSSIs – assessing the need for action

The need for urgent action has been underlined by recent findings on the condition of English Nature’s upland SSSIs. Nearly 70 per cent of upland heathland and calcareous grassland – an area of over 140,000 ha – is in poor condition due to among other issues heavy grazing and poor burning.

For birds such as the merlin, red grouse and the rapidly declining black grouse, upland heathland such as that of the North Pennine Moors is a vital stronghold. These heaths also support rare and local invertebrates, mosses and liverworts whilst other fragile species such as the juniper rely on upland calcareous grassland. With blanket bogs and montane habitats also suffering, the potential long-term impact on upland biodiversity is profound.

Critically, there is a need to:

- provide a landscape which allows wildlife to respond to climate change, and
- reduce the emissions of diffuse atmospheric pollution.

“We hope that this report achieves a wider ownership of the vision for the uplands and the problems facing wildlife there,” David concludes. “We share responsibility for securing a sustainable future for the uplands and can achieve this only if we work in partnership, and hence we urge partners to work with us to meet our Upland Challenge.”

The devastating impact of the Foot and Mouth epidemic upon the livestock industry places yet greater urgency upon meeting this “Upland Challenge” and provided a focus for the launch of the report on 8 May.

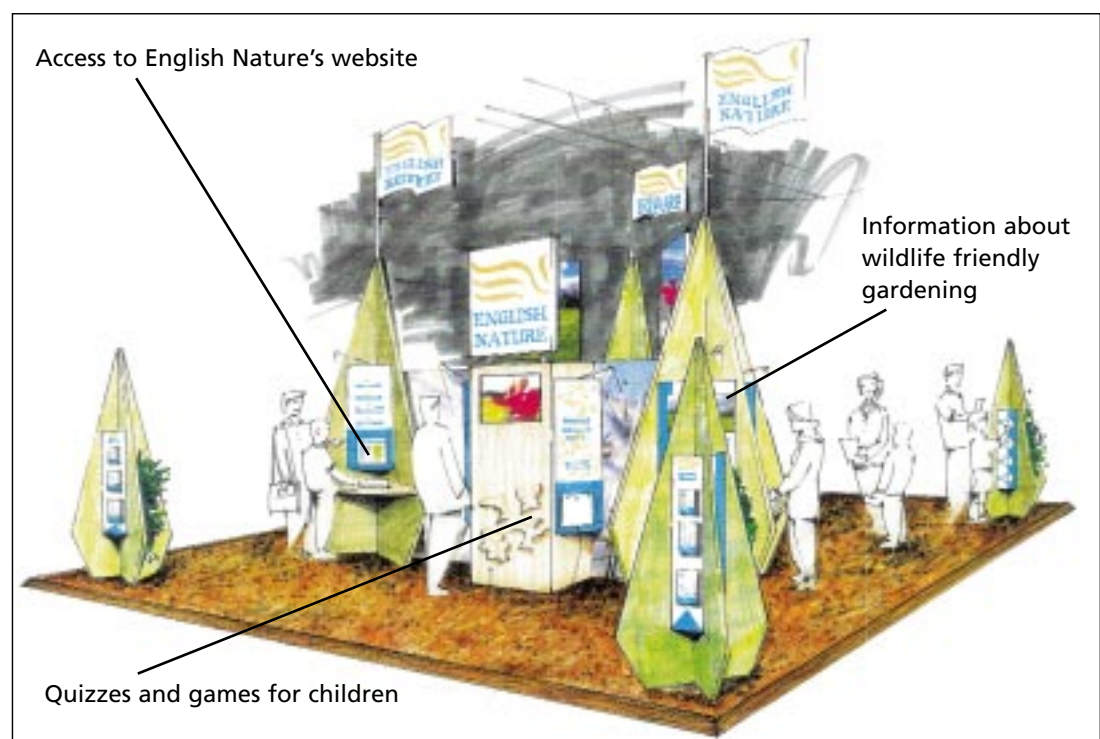
For a copy of the report, contact Two Ten Communications on 0870 1214 177

Going 'wild' in the garden

As many as 180,000 people could learn to go 'wild' in the garden next month as a team of English Nature experts set up residence at the BBC's Gardeners' World Live Show 2001. The event takes place at Birmingham's NEC from 13th to 17th June and will be the 'showcase' for a new look English Nature stand.

With the help of a hi-tech, walk-in stand with interactive facilities, which has been designed specifically for English Nature, the team will be seeking to show visitors how to encourage wildlife into their gardens. Not just that, but also to raise awareness of gardening methods that will help – not hinder – the environment. Specialists in biodiversity, plants, peat-free compost, urban wildlife, bugs, beetles, amphibians, mini beasts and birds will be on hand to offer advice and there will be plenty of information to take away and apply at home.

Key presenter at the show and putting his weight behind the plan is gardening celebrity, Alan Titchmarsh. "English Nature's messages about conserving nature and wildlife are of importance to us all if we want to see our gardens rich in plant and animal life. Biodiversity – the vast array of plant and animal life on our planet – is something we should all be working for, especially our gardens.



An artist's impression of the new stand.

"I hope that when gardeners come to this year's show, they will make a point of visiting English Nature's stand in our holistic gardening area to pick up know how from the experts, which they can then put to use on their own 'patch'.

The show will be open daily from 09.00 to 18.00. For further information ring 020 8307 2350.

A Few Tips

Gardening techniques

- Mow the lawn less and put clippings on a compost heap.

Amphibians

- Amphibians love rockeries, compost heaps and log piles.

Bluebells and snowdrops

- These plants are often illegally taken from the wild. If you would like them in your garden please ensure that you get them from a reputable supplier.

When nature calls

Information line, signpost, first port of call, last hope – like the Emergency Services, the Enquiry Service has to be ready to deal with a range of requests and is now one of English Nature's most valuable assets.

When the idea for an enquiry service was put forward in 1995, it was little realised just what a vital part of English Nature it would become. From a little over 2,000 general enquiries a year when first launched, the service now fields some 18,000, anything from queries about invasive plant species and animal introductions to the CROW Act and careers in nature conservation.

"We even had one woman ring recently and ask if we could help her find a dozen broomsticks," says Enquiry Service Manager Dick Seamons, who along with Sue Campbell and Steve Walker make up the team. "I believe that she wanted them for a charity event and had already tried the Forestry Commission!

"We're essentially the interface between the public and the knowledge and experience that is locked up in English Nature. If we can answer an enquiry ourselves then we will, if not then we can refer them on to any number of other organisations that may be able to help."

Being very aware of what is going on in the organisation, almost to the extent of being nosy, is crucial to the team's effectiveness. "We liaise with specialists on a fairly regular basis, but much of our working knowledge is picked up through word of mouth, press releases, news cuttings and so forth," says Dick. The team also have a number of other sources of information at their disposal, including an electronic database of books and

articles, which can be checked for suitable references. A complete stock of all English Nature's publicity material – with the exception of priced publications – also stays close to hand including over 400 research reports.

"A lot of people don't fully appreciate the role of English Nature" says Dick, "so we raise awareness of the work by sending out an explanatory leaflet to enquirers, together with publications that may be of use to them." On most occasions, the team manages to exceed the ten working day response time required under English Nature's Charter Mark accreditation. Evaluation cards included in all mail sent to enquirers also show a high rate of satisfaction among users.

Enquiries come via the phone, fax – people have even been known to come in person bearing eggs or dead and injured wildlife

"At the same time, there is also something of an education process going on," Dick continues. "Our priority is the well-being of wildlife and the environment and that is something



The Enquiry Team. From left, Sue Campbell, Steve Walker and Dick Seamons

we have to get people to understand, although sometimes it has to be done sensitively. On one occasion a woman rang up very distressed about a snake in her garden. It was harmless, but she wanted it destroyed. We suggested that, by putting a local herpetological expert in touch with her, we might save the snake and find ways of making her garden less attractive to others in the future."

Enquiries come via the phone, fax – people have even been known to come in person bearing eggs or dead and injured wildlife – but the fastest growing means is via e-mail. "It is convenient and means that we can reply very quickly to requests," continues Dick. "Likewise, the Internet is becoming an increasingly important addition to the service we provide. Much of the information people are looking for is there and it may not be long before we see all research reports published on-line in their entirety."

Watch this space.

The Enquiry Service is open from 8.00 to 17.00 weekdays and is available by calling 01733 455100.

Access for all

A growing number of English Nature's National Nature Reserves (NNRs) have facilities designed to encourage visitors with physical disabilities or special needs. But it's not about making disability a special issue – 'Access for all' really does mean that improvements for some are improvements for everybody.

Since the shift of thinking from NNRs as places that need to be protected from the public, to places which need to be experienced, understood and appreciated, improving public access has become increasingly important for English Nature.

"The sheer level of work that still needed to be done was very much underlined in the 1998 Audit of Access," says Simon Melville, Publicity Manager with English Nature's External Relations Team who has responsibility for NNR accessibility. "We went for quick wins so as to make a real difference on the ground as soon as possible. Exchanging a stile with a kissing gate, for example, is easily done and can make the difference between access and no access for some visitors. Since then, focus has moved more to those sites where a little more work needs to be done: replacing a narrow bridge with a wider one, surfacing and grading paths and so forth."

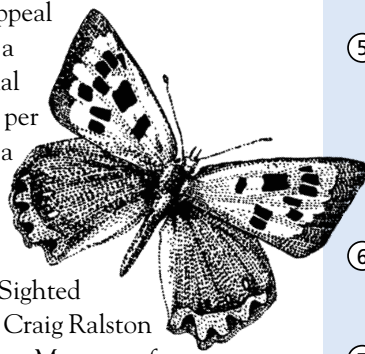
"The key point to remember is that by improving access for those with disabilities, you really do make it better for everyone. For example, widening a path will not only allow a wheelchair to pass along, but also a parent pushing a child's buggy."

It isn't just about physical improvements. As part of an annual programme of

events, many sites now offer guided walks designed to appeal to those with a range of special needs. "Once per year, we hold a walk for the local branch of the Blind and Partially Sighted Society," says Craig Ralston who is Assistant Manager of the Lower Derwent Valley NNR near English Nature's York office. "That's a perfect example of how the reserve can open hearts and minds on a range of levels." (See the back page for an example.)

"Of course, many NNRs will remain difficult to access either because of their remoteness, ruggedness or the sheer fragility of their habitats," adds Simon. "That doesn't mean to say that there isn't still plenty to do to enable more people to appreciate England's NNRs. I think that the importance of this issue can only point to the distribution of further resources and that over the next two years, we'll see significant improvements all round."

For further information on access issues, contact the Enquiry Service on 01733 455101 or Simon Melville on 01635 268881.



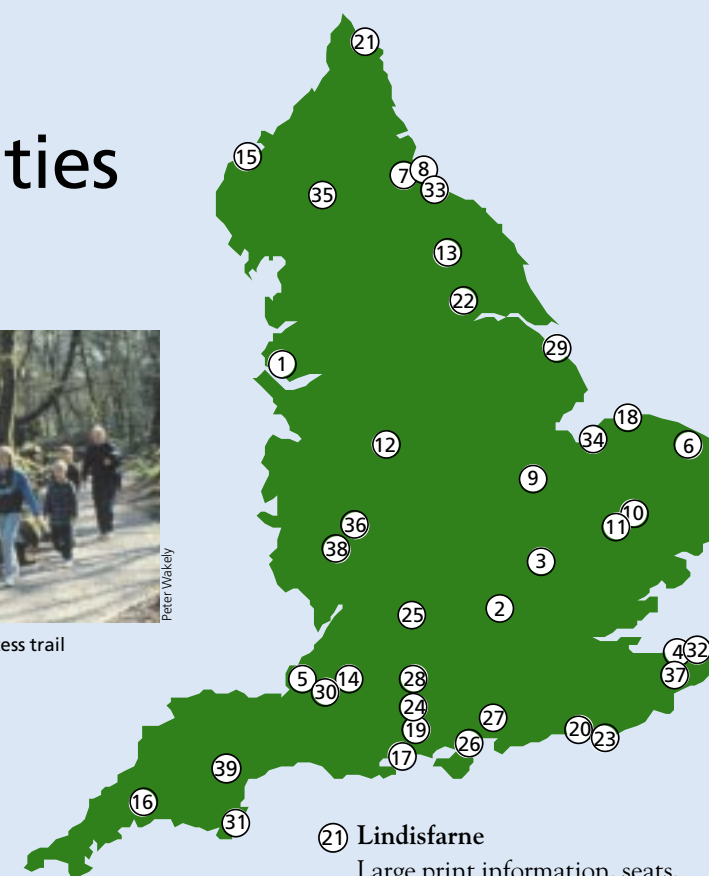
NNRs with facilities for visitors with disabilities

- ① **Ainsdale Sand Dunes**
Hard-surfaced tracks
- ② **Aston Rowant**
Interpretation panels, seats, on-site parking
- ③ **Barton Hills**
Surfaced paths to NNR entrance, seats
- ④ **Blean Woods**
Seats
- ⑤ **Bridgwater Bay**
Interpretation panels, seats, vehicular access by prior arrangement, much of site visible and accessible from public road
- ⑥ **Bure Marshes**
Information centre, seats
- ⑦ **Cassop Vale**
Seats, (steep) concrete access track
- ⑧ **Castle Eden Dene**
Seats, ramps to information centre, * accessible toilets, * events programme (*available only to school groups booked in advance)
- ⑨ **Castor Hanglands**
Disabled parking (by arrangement), staff trained with sympathetic hearing
- ⑩ **Cavenham Heath**
Seats
- ⑪ **Chippenham Fen**
Seats
- ⑫ **Derbyshire Dales**
Staff trained in manual alphabet, RADAR keyed easy-access route Lathkill Dale, information centre



Stodmarsh NNR, Kent – disabled access trail

- ⑬ **Duncombe Park**
Seats, information centre, on-site parking
- ⑭ **Ebbor Gorge**
Short easy-access trail to viewpoint from car park, seats, information centre
- ⑮ **Findlandrigg Woods**
Easy-access boardwalk, seats
- ⑯ **Golitha Falls**
On-site parking, easy-access
- ⑰ **Hartland Moor**
Easy-access track, seats
- ⑱ **Holkham**
Braille information, seats, disabled parking, wheelchair access to hides
- ⑲ **Holt Heath**
On-site parking
- ⑳ **Lewes Downs (Mount Caburn)**
Seats



- ⑳ **Lindisfarne**
Large print information, seats, disabled parking, wheelchair access to hides
- ㉑ **Lower Derwent Valley**
Engraved information signs, seats, disabled parking, wheelchair access to hides, easy-access boardwalk
- ㉒ **Lullington Heath**
Information centre, disabled parking
- ㉓ **Martin Down**
On-site parking
- ㉔ **North Meadow, Cricklade**
Wheelchair access gate, interpretation panels
- ㉕ **North Solent**
Wheelchair access to hide, seats, disabled parking
- ㉖ **Old Winchester Hill**
Easy-access route, tactile interpretation panels, seats, RADAR access to disabled parking
- ㉗ **Parsonage Down**
Accessible toilets, on-site parking
- ㉘ **Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe**
Easy-access route, tactile interpretation panels, audio tape information and tape player hire, disabled parking, accessible toilets (May–Sept), seats, braille leaflet, staff interpretation officer available for visits (Apr–Sept)
- ㉙ **Shapwick Heath**
Wheelchair access to hides, seats, other facilities at nearby information centre, easy-access boardwalk
- ㉚ **Slapton Ley**
Seats, wheelchair access to hides, information centre, disabled parking
- ㉛ **Stodmarsh**
Easy-access routes, wheelchair access to hides, seats, disabled parking, accessible toilets
- ㉜ **Teesmouth**
Disabled parking, easy-access route, wheelchair access gates, wheelchair access to hides
- ㉝ **The Wash**
Seats
- ㉞ **Upper Teesdale**
On-site parking, wheelchair access gate, easy-access route
- ㉟ **Wren's Nest**
Wheelchair access to information centre, wheelchair accessible gates
- ㊱ **Wye**
On-site parking, seats
- ㊲ **Wyre Forest**
Easy-access route, disabled parking
- ㊳ **Yarner Wood**
Seats, disabled parking

Giving a project its wings



Bird fanciers. From left, Clare Collier, Nick Askew, Craig Ralston, Darren Wilde and his mother Christine.

English Nature's approach to issues such as disability access can only work with the commitment of those on the ground. Our York team has taken this 'can do' attitude a step further by helping a young man with moderate learning difficulties to create a haven for one of England's most endearing farmland birds – the barn owl.



For the last four years, Craig Ralston of English Nature's York team has been closely involved in a project to monitor and conserve one of Europe's biggest populations of barn owl. Little wonder then that when asked if he could help get a fledgling project concerning this bird off the ground, he jumped at the chance.

Putting in the call was Stephen Jenkinson, a countryside management consultant and mentor to Darren Wilde whose idea it was to improve barn owl numbers on arable land fringing a local urban area. Working towards the Peak Potential Millennium Awards, a lottery-funded scheme, which provides grants for self-help and community focused projects, Darren was inspired by his involvement at the Ponderosa Rural Therapeutic Centre in Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire. The centre helps disabled children and adults to interact with, and care for, animals and it was Darren's hand-rearing of young barn owls that got the ball rolling.

"We were at a stage where we could really have done with some specialist advice," says Stephen, "and after speaking to

various wildlife trusts, were pointed in the direction of Craig who had something of a reputation for his work with owls. He was thoroughly taken with the idea and agreed to come to the centre to offer his experience, even though it was outside the boundary of his office. That's what was most impressive – that there was no bureaucracy, just a willingness to help."

After checking in with the local Wakefield office, Craig, accompanied by NNR volunteer Nick Askew, made the trip and quickly got down to discussing the plans with Darren and Stephen. "The focus of Darren's original idea was the release of a number of birds reared at the centre," says Craig. "We suggested that improving the surrounding habitat itself would have a broader impact, not just in raising owl numbers, but also that of other species such as skylarks, grey partridges and tree sparrows. It's something that the community would also be able to really enjoy." A walk around the site confirmed the potential and nest boxes were discussed, as were the ideas of suggesting stewardship schemes to local landowners and other forms of land management.

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So that Darren might see some of these ideas in action, he and Stephen were in turn invited to the 1,000-hectare grassland NNR of Lower Derwent Valley where

Craig is Assistant Site Manager. "We couldn't have set it up any better," he says. "It was a really good day and as well as boxes, Darren saw his first wild barn owls and a thriving population of voles in the stewardship field margins – essential to an owl's diet."

"Craig has given a lot of help," says Darren, "but it was actually seeing those owls that made me realise just how important this project is to me. I now feel confident of succeeding."

Craig has since been in regular contact, providing background information on issues such as stewardship and contacts who might come and speak at the centre. He has said that he will again visit during the summer to see how the project is shaping up towards its completion."

"I don't want Darren to come to the end of this project and then just stop," concludes Craig. "Rather, I want him to get it up and running and self-sustaining by involving others. That way, people – and wildlife – might continue to enjoy the fruits of his work."



Darren's interest in the project was sparked through raising barn owls at the Ponderosa Centre.