



A walk on the wild side

Why nature and good health are natural partners

The path to recovery

National Nature Reserves – good for mind as well as body

Fit the natural way

'Green Gyms' get people out into our wildlife-rich spaces

Kite watching

A success story, but red kites are still vulnerable

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: Paul Glendell/English Nature

Spending time in green spaces, such as Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve (above), has proven benefits for health. (see the feature beginning page 5)

brief update

Woodland management gains recognition

David Burton/English Nature



Langley Wood National Nature Reserve

English Nature has been awarded a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certificate from the Soil Association's Woodmark Programme in recognition that its woodland estates are managed sustainably.

"The award is highly regarded in the forestry world," said Langley Wood site manager, David Burton. "Timber products from our woods will now bear the FSC logo, which will help us market our produce; and regular audits will ensure we maintain these standards."

A rich variety of native trees grow in south Wiltshire's National Nature Reserve, Langley Wood, including small-leaved lime, sessile and pedunculate oak, alder and hazel. The wood supports many species of plants and animals including bluebells, wood anemones, rare lichens, ferns and fungi, dead-wood invertebrates and moths, three species of woodpecker and five species of deer.

Langley Wood was planted with conifers for commercial reasons from the 1950s to the 1970s. Now, in Langley Wood, as in other similar woods, the conifers are being gradually removed in order to restore it to native broadleaved woodland.

"In Langley Wood the preferred method of restoration is through natural regeneration," said David. "Two conifer plantations have been thinned to encourage natural regeneration of native seedlings. To aid the regeneration of oak, one of the clear-felled areas will be grazed by livestock to produce ideal conditions for oak seedlings. Voluntary wardens are actively involved in this work, helping to care for the livestock and informing the rest of the local community about the work."

Other projects include: the use of coppiced, broadleaved wood to make charcoal by a local woodsman to sell locally; and an easy-access gate and new entrance sign-posts to the woods made from timber grown within it.

Old alliance makes stand on beaches

An alliance of English and French conservationists is helping to keep one particularly unwelcome visitor firmly at bay.

Introduced to Northumbria's Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve in 1929 to stabilise intertidal areas, the invasive grass *Spartina anglica* – or common cord-grass – has been threatening internationally important waterfowl populations. Its vigorous growth means that it quickly forms a dense blanket of vegetation over mudflats, restricting the availability of a rich food source for the birds.

Now the grass has appeared at the Baie de Somme Reserve in northern France. To share ideas on how best to tackle the problem, English Nature's Site Manager at Lindisfarne, Phil Davey, and his French counterpart, Patrick Triplet, have been working closely together.

"The principal aim at both reserves is to maintain and enhance internationally important populations of migratory birds, such as pale-bellied brent geese, ringed plover and dunlin, by reducing the 'squeeze' effect," said Phil. "Open sand and mudflats – habitat for the invertebrates

upon which the birds depend – are caught between rising sea levels and the advance of the aggressive *Spartina*.

"Studies in both countries have demonstrated the effectiveness of 'rotoburying' as a control method as this recreates open mudflats, which are soon rich in invertebrates and eelgrass."

Rotoburying involves turning over the mud to a depth of 25cm with the aid of a tractor and large plough-like attachment. In this way, the grass is buried below ground and a fresh covering of mud is provided on the surface.

"The results are looking very positive so far," added Phil. "We've not seen any recolonisation of *Spartina* on the rotoburied areas, and yet other plants, such as samphire, have established, which is great news as these are seed-bearing plants used by finches and larks in winter. There's also been a good growth of eelgrass, which is a food source of the globally threatened pale-bellied brent geese as well as wigeon."

Want more wildlife in your garden?

Have you ever wondered what plant seeds goldfinches are most likely to eat? Or how you can increase your chances of getting an orange-tip butterfly or privet hawkmoth into your garden? Well, the *Gardening with wildlife in mind* CD can help you find the answers.

With over 800 profiles on species of plants and animals, as well as advice and more than 200 handy tips, the CD is the perfect tool to find out how you can encourage wildlife into your garden.

The CD, which has been produced by English Nature and published by the Plant Press, shows which plants are eaten by which creatures, and gives information on how to create good nesting and shelter habitats..

There are around 15,000,000 gardens in Britain and each could play some role in wildlife conservation. "Without too much effort,

everyone can make a personal and positive contribution to the conservation of wildlife in England," said English Nature's Chairman, Sir Martin Doughty. And, according to Chris Baines, author of *How to make a wildlife garden?*, the advice is pretty straightforward. "If we choose plants carefully, avoid poisonous chemicals and tolerate a little decay, even the smallest of gardens can become a haven for many native plants and animals."

The CD is priced at £9.99 (add £1.50 for postage and packaging) and is available direct from: The Plant Press, 10 Market Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2NB, or telephone 01273 476151.

EDITORIAL

Happy New Year!

One of our resolutions this year is to make the English Nature magazine more interesting, useful and enjoyable to read. We need your help with this. Please could you take a few minutes to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the pre-paid envelope by 20 February. Your comments and views would be very useful so I very much hope that you will share them with us. Thank you.

The New Year is always a time of year when lots of people want to get out and get fit. On pages 5 to 9 we look at some of the real health benefits of the great outdoors.

At Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve (NNR) the first Green Gym (see pages 8 and 9) has been so popular that 50 other Green Gym groups have been set up elsewhere. In the Derbyshire Dales, Lathkill Dale NNR is being used as the focus of a rehabilitation programme for drug misusers (see page 6), while other NNRs are used by Her Majesty's Prison Service to help offenders learn new skills before they re-integrate into society (see page 7).

But our wonderful, wild spaces are also places where we go simply for pleasure, and what could be better on a crisp, cold winter afternoon than watching a flock of Bewick's swans flying in low to their night-time, open-water roosting sites. On pages 10 and 11 we look at the best places to go to see superb displays of wintering waterbirds.

Please remember the questionnaire!

Amanda Giles

Editor: Amanda Giles | Designed & printed by: Corporate Document Services, 7 Eastgate, Leeds LS2 7LY www.cds.co.uk
Tel. 078106 55418 | on Evolution Satin (75% recycled post-consumer waste paper, elemental chlorine-free bleached), 17M.

Although English Nature magazine does not have a regular letters page, I am always interested in receiving feedback about the magazine, or letters on subjects that may be of interest to our readers. If there is a subject that you feel would be relevant to our readership, please write to me or email me, and I will certainly consider publishing your letter in the magazine.

Contact me, Amanda Giles, at English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA, or at amanda.giles@english-nature.org.uk

If this copy of English Nature magazine is not your own, and you would like to go on our mailing list to receive the magazine regularly, please contact Alison Eley, IMT, English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA.

Or you can email your details to alison.eley@english-nature.org.uk

brief update

Noble rot

One of our rarest and most vulnerable beetles now faces a slightly more secure future thanks to new research.

The noble chafer traditionally favours old, often neglected, orchards where the larvae thrive on the rotting wood of dead trees. But this is a fast disappearing habitat and, even here, the species is notoriously difficult to find.

English Nature and the People's Trust for Endangered Species have been working hard to implement the Biodiversity Action Plan for the species and have now made an important breakthrough.

"Several members of the project's steering group began to breed the beetles in captivity," said Dr Valerie Keeble, Chief Executive of the Trust. "They discovered that the larvae have very characteristic droppings called 'frass', which, to

the practised eye, are possible to spot quite easily among the rotting wood mould."

Using this new indicator has markedly improved the success rate of finding beetles and, while still very rare, has identified the traditional fruit-growing counties of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire as their core area. It has also highlighted the continuing loss of their orchard habitat and the consequential absence of beetles. The focus of the work has turned to safeguarding what habitat remains.

"Tree Protection Orders cannot be granted on dead and dying trees, and designating orchards as Sites of Special Scientific Interest is equally difficult because, as yet, there are no guidelines for such designation," added Valerie. "We are, therefore, looking at the new agri-environment schemes and are hoping that they will help."

The project is seeking to raise public awareness of the beetles by producing pictorial postcards with details of where and how they can be found. For more information contact 020 7498 4533.



Rare even in its orchard habitat, the noble chafer is coloured a beautiful iridescent green

Working together for a better service

Lord Haskins' long-awaited review has been published with 33 recommendations on how to improve the delivery of rural policy. Key among these, has been plans to integrate the work of English Nature with part of that of the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service.

In asking Lord Haskins to undertake the review, the Government was seeking to:

- simplify or rationalise the existing means of delivery and establish clear roles, responsibilities and effective co-ordination;
- achieve efficiency savings and maximise value for money;
- provide better, more streamlined, services to end customers in a more unified, transparent and convenient way; and
- identify arrangements that can help deliver Defra's rural policies and Public Service Agreements target cost-effectively.

The review looked at the responsibilities of Defra and several of its agencies, including English Nature, where our work relates to the delivery of Defra's rural policies.

"English Nature understands and supports many of the principles outlined in Lord Haskins Report," said Andy Brown, Chief Executive of English Nature. "The proposed integration would build on, and so strengthen, English Nature's work rather than weaken it. There are real opportunities ahead and an enhanced organisation should be able to deliver environmental improvements, more public benefits and better services."

"We have been very gratified by the level of support English Nature received when Lord Haskins' report was published," added Andy. "Our role as the Government's independent nature conservation advisor for England is clearly valued by many people. We were very encouraged by Margaret Beckett's acknowledgement of our worldwide reputation in biodiversity matters and the value that she, as Secretary of State, places on the independent advice she receives. It is essential that any new arrangements retain this ability to give independent advice to Government."

Expectations are that the Government will publish its response to Lord Haskins' report in

the spring when future arrangements will become clearer.

In the meantime, English Nature staff are getting on with the job of working closely with all our partners, as well as an increasingly wide range of communities, for the benefit of wildlife and to help people access, enjoy and appreciate England's natural environment. The organisation will be working closely with Defra and the other organisations included in the review to develop firm proposals to ensure we are well-placed to deal with future challenges such as implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy and climate change.

"English Nature has developed a strong reputation and service culture," said Andy. "We have won, across the organisation as a whole, both Charter Marks and Investors in People accreditation three times in a row. These awards show how determined we all are to continue to play our part and to improve the services we provide to the Government and the public, so that our children and their children can enjoy and benefit from an attractive, diverse and healthy natural environment, wherever they live and work."

Nature

Paul Glendell/English Nature

– the healthy choice

There is growing evidence to support what everyone knew all along – that being out in nature is good for you.

It's more than just a vague sense that fresh air and exercise are beneficial. Over 300 studies suggest that time spent in green spaces – such as Local and National Nature Reserves – is good for your physical, mental and social well-being.

Physical activity, such as walking or simple conservation work, reduces the risk of heart disease, while pollution is much lower in green spaces and so less likely to trigger asthma, a chronic childhood disease. Even simply viewing spaces rich in nature can reduce stress within a few minutes, restore concentration and improve productivity. And then there are the social factors – green space are a focus for community activity, helping to break down barriers between different age groups and cultures and creating a sense of place. These are just a few of the potential benefits.

Ways of making the best use of this information have been discussed at a recent World Health Organisation International Healthy Cities Conference, meetings at the Labour Party Conference and of the NHS Alliance, and an English Nature/UK Public Health Association/British Ecological Society seminar.

A consensus from all the events was that Government should recognise our green spaces as key to the delivery of a wide range of social goals – including sustainable public health. It's a position that English Nature and many of its partners fully support and is one that we act on; GPs in Bournemouth, for example, are already prescribing heathland walks as one of their array of treatments. There are other examples in the pages that follow.

There could even be a financial incentive for the NHS. Savings of as much as £2 billion could be made if the NHS made better use of these opportunities.

But the picture extends further. There are significant inequalities in the standard of health and quality of life from area to area, yet these could be dealt with, in part, by improving the quality of the local environment and the way in which communities use it. The New Opportunities Fund *Wildspace!* scheme funds projects doing just this.

Achieving all this depends on a joined-up effort from a large and very diverse, range of organisations. Still more, it means changing attitudes and behaviour among some communities to the green space on their doorstep. And there lies the challenge.

A number of documents relating to nature are now available to view or order on the English Nature website:

Nature and psychological well-being (English Nature Research Report No 533)

Revealing the value of nature – a summary

Human well-being, natural landscapes and wildlife in urban areas

(English Nature Science Report No 22)

Accessible natural greenspace in towns and cities: A review of appropriate size and distance criteria (English Nature Research Report No 153)

A breath of fresh air

At the Labour Party Conference in November, English Nature, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the New Opportunities Fund launched a new partnership to help communities create and use nature-rich local green space to benefit health and quality of life. Here are some of the reasons why:

Physical well-being

Peripheral vascular disease makes walking difficult. Drug treatment costs £28.76 per metre of walking distance gained, organised groups using local green space costs £0.28 per metre gained.

Mental well-being

One in four people suffer with mental health problems. Using local green space alleviates symptoms of anxiety, depression and insomnia.

Social well-being

Senior citizens in urban areas live longer and have a more positive attitude to their community if there is green space to visit near their home.

The path to recovery

For the clients of Phoenix House in Sheffield, being out and active in the Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve is more than just good for body and mind, it's a way back from the misery of substance abuse.

Lathkill Dale National Nature Reserve (NNR) is undoubtedly a place of quiet beauty. From its daleside grasslands and rising limestone cliffs, to its ancient woodlands and swift running river, it is a place to breathe deep and reflect. It is these very qualities that first attracted Phoenix House, an organisation dedicated to helping substance misusers end their dependence on drugs and alcohol and rebuild their lives.

The NNR is the focus of its Outdoor Activities Programme, which it delivers in partnership with English Nature. Its residential treatment programme has a strong conservation element in which Phoenix House clients work alongside a conservation officer on projects which maintain and improve the reserve.

"The real objective instead is to enhance the well-being of participants," said Jon Hall who manages the programme for Phoenix House. "We do this by working against the negative effects of substance abuse, such as low self-esteem and the need for instant gratification. By challenging individuals through conservation work, we hope to build their self-confidence and develop their motivation."

Over the last three years, hundreds of people have benefited, learning new skills and, in so doing, finding out more about themselves. The most

recent project has been to construct a drystone wall in Lathkill Dale as a boundary for a wildflower meadow.

"It's a good illustration of how recovery works. The skills have to be learnt and building the wall is a painstaking task – there is no instant outcome. But it's also built to last, so there are tangible results. Then there are the metaphors for people's recovery: 'one stone is supported by others', etc."

The success of the Outdoor Activities Programme relies on three areas of therapeutic benefit. The first is the activity itself as described above; the second is the power of the natural environment in which the work takes place and the third is the communication and relationships that individuals develop between themselves during the course of the programme.

"Even though I'm delivering this programme, I'm very much on the fringe – it's all about the participants taking the lead and making it their own. This 200-yard long wall has become a real emblem for them. There was an in-depth discussion the other day about the respect there is for everyone who has expended blood, sweat and tears on it. That's powerful stuff and a real lever for change in people's lives."

According to English Nature Site Manager Ben Le Bas, the partnership is valuable and not just for the extra sets of hands it provides. "We're not simply finding stuff for these people to do – it's important work that really does add something to the reserve. Here they're helping to recreate a hay meadow, one that people will be able to walk through on a footpath and enjoy."

"The quality of their work is very high, given that almost all start as novices. Their drystone walls look as good as many contractors. But it's not only walling – they've also done excellent work for us controlling vegetation on the River Lathkill and helping us line a field pond with stone."

For more information on Phoenix House and its work helping substance misusers to rebuild their lives, visit www.phoenixhouse.org.uk.



Building this drystone wall in beautiful Lathkill Dale is helping to transform lives blighted by substance abuse

"There was an in-depth discussion the other day about the respect there is for everyone who has expended blood, sweat and tears on it. That's powerful stuff and a real lever for change in people's lives."

Breaking new ground

Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS) might seem an unlikely partner for English Nature, but the organisations are forging an alliance in which wildlife and offenders stand to gain.

English Nature runs 144 National Nature Reserves (NNRs), most of which need labour-intensive management work, but have too few people available to do it. HMPS is responsible for 127 prisons, with people keen to learn new skills to help them re-integrate into society on their release. A Home Office target is to reduce re-offending by 5 per cent by 2006. English Nature may play a role in helping to achieve this.

The second largest landowner among Government bodies, HMPS has an estate which includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest and hundreds of areas of local nature conservation importance. Some prisons even have wildlife gardens – at Holloway prison in London, 22 species of butterfly have been recorded, a respectable total even for an NNR!

"We see this as one way to help end the cycle of re-offending"

HMPS's action statement on biodiversity is the responsibility of Phil Thomas. One goal is to build closer ties with English Nature and the voluntary sector, to develop opportunities for training and education for prisoners.

Links between NNRs and prisons have already been established. In November 2003, at Barton Hills NNR in Bedfordshire, prisoners from Springhill Open Prison at Grendon Underwood, near Aylesbury, came to erect fencing in the first of a series of regular work sessions. In 2004, one prisoner will work at Aston Rowant NNR for 40 days towards an NVQ in environment conservation.

"I'd like to see this experiment replicated right across the country," said Phil Thomas. "If we could have even 10 per cent of prisons linked with a reserve by the end of 2006, that would be massive progress."

"We see this as one way to help end the cycle of re-offending. Prisons only work if they can stop people breaking the law once they've got a choice again."

Rachel Dedman, English Nature's Assistant Site Manager at Aston Rowant, was equally upbeat. "The project is only in its infancy, but we're optimistic about its future as both the offenders and wildlife stand to gain. We can help people acquire marketable nature conservation skills in their work here. They appreciate being in the open air in pleasant surroundings and the work is (mostly!) enjoyable."

Fit the natural way



Building benches at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve

Sonning Common Green Gym

Think health and fitness and you will probably think of a gym or aerobic class. But the natural link has traditionally been with the great outdoors. Now conservation charity BTCV is re-establishing that link through 'Green Gyms' in our wildlife-rich spaces.



Creation of sheep enclosure to protect juniper

Sonning Common Green Gym



Shrub clearance at Aston Rowant NNR

Sonning Common Green Gym

How does it work?

- BTCV Green Gyms offer regular sessions of conservation activities in accordance with health and safety guidelines. People can join for an hour or more on a weekly or twice-weekly basis.
- Experienced leaders provide training in practical skills and encourage people to work according to their own capabilities.
- BTCV Green Gyms are open to people of all ages and from all walks of life.
- Health professionals, including GPs, nurses and health visitors, play a role in recommending the Green Gym to their patients.
- Where appropriate, BTCV facilitates Green Gym community groups. BTCV Officers provide training and support so that local people develop their skills and confidence in order to run the scheme themselves. Ongoing support is provided through BTCV's Community Network.

The proven benefits

Taking part in regular BTCV Green Gym sessions can improve cardiovascular fitness and, therefore, reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. Such were the findings of research conducted by Oxford Brookes University on the Sonning Common Green Gym volunteers.

The range of activities in a BTCV Green Gym also allows participants to exercise at a level that suits individual capabilities. Participation can improve muscular strength, which can mean fewer falls and increased coping ability and independence. These benefits are particularly important for older people.

BTCV Green Gyms can also provide a range of social and mental benefits, which contribute to an individual's well-being:

- Many people today feel isolated from others through no fault of their own. Social isolation is a risk factor for physical and mental illness. Working in a group, like a Green Gym, can help people to meet.
- The feeling of achievement, which comes from completing a task, such as planting a new hedge, builds confidence and self-esteem.
- The Green Gym has a positive impact upon quality of life by providing interaction between the participant and their environment.

If you would like to find out more about Green Gyms, particularly those in your area, visit the BTCV website at www.btcv.org/greengym

Each Thursday and Saturday morning, Julia Booker joins 12 or 18 like-minded souls in any one of several green spaces in the Oxfordshire countryside. They start the day with some serious stretching and, once warmed-up, begin the serious work of scrub clearance, hedge laying, tree planting – whatever is required to help maintain the site. But this isn't standard voluntary work – this is a Green Gym.

"I joined the Sonning Common Green Gym group principally because I needed to get fit," said Julia who has been involved since the initiative started in 1998. "Having brought up a family of teenagers, I needed more energy in my life. Aerobic classes and the local gym just weren't interesting enough. And then I heard about the Green Gym idea and thought 'wow' – an opportunity to get what I want while out and active in the countryside."

"Initially, it was hard work, but it's work that you want to see through to the end. After a few months I felt much stronger and really noticed the benefits elsewhere in my life, simple things like carrying the shopping. And I've gradually got to know the rest of the group, so there is a social aspect too."

The group regularly visits Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, working closely with English Nature site managers, such as Dominic Harmer.

"They are a great group of people to work with. Much of the practical work we do here, such as scrub clearance, would be nigh on impossible without them because they are very organised, very well-trained and always bring good numbers.

Almost a third more calories can be burnt in an hour of taking part in a Green Gym session than in doing a step aerobics class!

"They also have a great attitude and are eager to share their ideas. There is a very diverse mix of backgrounds in the group and that, combined with their experience of working on other sites, means that they have some valuable suggestions," said Dominic.

The first of its kind in the UK, the Green Gym was originally the brainchild of Dr William Bird of Sonning Common Health Centre. BTCV had been looking for ways to link health, the environment and sustainable development, as promoted at the Rio World Summit, and immediately recognised the potential of Dr Bird's idea. With funding from

Shell and the Countryside Agency, they set up a pilot, which became the Sonning Common Green Gym.

"Green Gyms are first and foremost about improving the health, well-being and social networks of the individuals that come along," said Mick Denness, BTCV's South East Regional Director. "We have all noticed that there is a feeling of well-being which comes from taking exercise. This is enhanced by being in the fresh air, and further enhanced by working in natural surroundings. To this, we can add a feeling of achievement when the exercise has an obvious visible result, both to the environment and to oneself! Our programme is much more satisfying than an exercise regime in a conventional gym – participants acquire a pronounced feeling of well-being and are more likely to continue to attend."

"Of course, as well as bringing benefits to the individual, significant work is done to improve the environment for wildlife. Oxford-Brookes University has also undertaken research, which shows that most people who come along have no experience of volunteer or conservation work at all. In a very subtle way, we're able to broaden the appeal of conservation and enable people to re-connect with nature."

Now is the time for...

Wintering waterbirds

Few places in the world can match the UK for its sheer volume of wintering waterbirds. On a crisp mid-winter weekend why not head out to our coastal or inland wetlands to enjoy the spectacle? Here's a selection of the best reserves to go to.

For more information on locations, opening times and access, visit the following websites:

English Nature
www.english-nature.org.uk

RSPB
www.rspb.org.uk

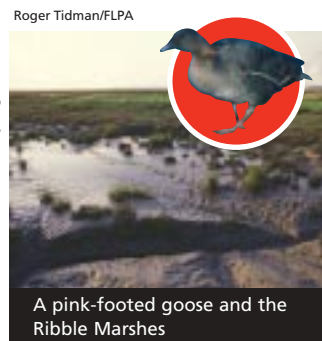
The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
www.wwt.org.uk

Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust
www.lrwt.org.uk

Chichester Harbour Conservancy
www.conservancy.co.uk

Roger Tidman/FLPA

Peter Wakely/English Nature



A pink-footed goose and the Ribble Marshes

The Lancashire coast
 With its mild climate and many sheltered estuaries and bays, the Lancashire coast has some world-class sites for migrating birds. The Ribble Estuary is one such site and the English Nature National Nature Reserve (NNR) here features one of the largest single areas of saltmarsh in

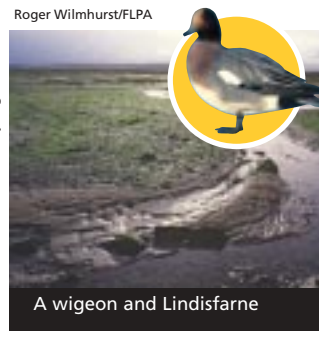
the country, attracting more than 100,000 ducks, geese and swans and over 150,000 waders.

Close by is the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve of Martin Mere, a winter home for several species of geese – numbers of pink-footed geese alone, have exceeded 30,000. Bewick's swans and dabbling ducks, such as mallard, gadwall, teal and shoveler, are also regular visitors.

The Morecambe Bay RSPB reserve provides another good opportunity to see wading birds and wildfowl feeding on wide expanses of sandflat and saltmarsh.

Roger Wilmhurst/FLPA

Peter Wakely/English Nature



A wigeon and Lindisfarne

Lindisfarne NNR

A complex of mudflats, saltmarsh and dune on the north Northumberland coast, Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve is a key wintering site, supporting up to 50,000 waterfowl at any one time.

It is the main wintering site in Britain for the Svalbard race of pale-bellied brent goose, which feed on the eel grass here. Lindisfarne also holds internationally important numbers of pink-footed geese, wigeon, bar-tailed godwits and grey plover.

Tony Hamblin/FLPA

Peter Wakely/English Nature



A Bewick's swan and the Ouse Washes

The Fens

The vast floodplains of the Ouse and Nene Washes attract particularly large numbers of swans and ducks – around 90,000 wildfowl, in total, during the winter months. This is partly due to their winter flooding and partly because of the abundant food, both on the washes

and in the surrounding sugarbeet and potato fields.

To see hundreds of Bewick's and whooper swans and thousands of ducks, visit the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve at Welney near Ely. Pintail, gadwall and shoveler are in abundance on the pools, while wigeon graze on areas of wet grassland nearby. Late afternoon sees swans flying in to their night-time, open-water roosting places from the surrounding fields where they have spent the day feeding.

Another place to best appreciate the Ouse Washes is the RSPB reserve at Welches Dam near Manea. A Special Protection Area, this is one of Europe's most important wintering sites for wildfowl including shoveler, teal, wigeon, pintail, pochard, Bewick's and whooper swans.



Jean-Louis LeMoigne/NHPA

Peter Wakely/English Nature



A Mediterranean gull and Rutland Water

East Midlands reservoirs

Although far from the coast, the East Midlands reservoirs are an essential stop on any wintering-bird tour. The large expanses of deep water attract important concentrations of diving, as well as dabbling, ducks, and are used as secure roost sites for thousands of gulls, which

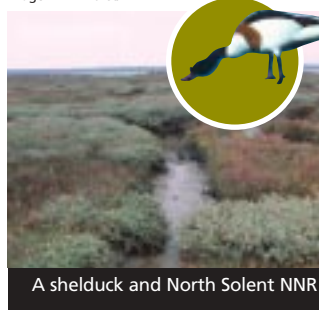
fly in at the end of each day from the surrounding areas.

First is Rutland Water, Britain's largest man-made reservoir managed by the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. It is of national importance for the great crested grebe and cormorant, as well as several species of duck. It also attracts scarcer ducks like the scaup and common scoter, and an impressive gull roost where rare species are regularly seen.

Other local options include Eye Brook Reservoir, which can attract large numbers of waders, often including large flocks of golden plovers; while the winter gull roost offers the prospect of Mediterranean and yellow-legged gulls among their more common brethren.

Roger Wilmhurst/FLPA

Peter Wakely/English Nature



A shelduck and North Solent NNR

The Greater Solent

The Greater Solent offers a good scattering of wintering-bird sites, among them, English Nature's North Solent NNR between Southampton Water and Lymington. The open shore, mudflats, saltmarsh and coastal grazing, make this site internationally

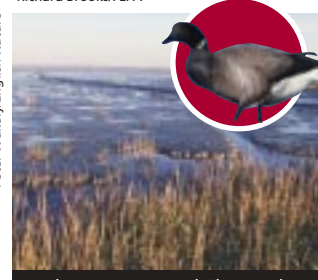
important for overwintering and migratory waterfowl, and nationally important for wading birds.

Sheltered Chichester Harbour also offers rich pickings – a daily average of some 55,000 waterbirds at this time of year. Managed by Chichester Harbour Conservancy, the site's mudflats provide a good source of food for wading birds. You will regularly find curlew, godwits, redshank and dunlin probing for small marine animals; and shelduck sifting the surface for small snails.

The adjacent RSPB reserve at Langstone Harbour, however, is the place for brent geese – 6,000 of them at any one time – which congregate on mudflats covered with a carpet of green algae.

Richard Brooks/FLPA

Peter Wakely/English Nature



A brent goose and The Wash

The Wash

A vast network of saltmarsh and mudflats, The Wash Site of Special Scientific Interest is one of Europe's most outstanding coastal wetlands and of international value for its waders and wildfowl.

English Nature's NNR on The Wash is regularly

visited by pink-footed and brent geese, wigeon, pintail and mallard. As the tide rises, thousands of waders feeding on the mudflats, are pushed towards roosting sites at the top of the beaches, sometimes taking to flight in flocks of many thousands.

To the east and west are the twin RSPB reserves of Snettisham and Frampton Marsh. Come to the former at dawn or dusk and, again, see thousands of pink-footed geese commuting between their resting and feeding sites. Arrive before high-tide at Frampton Marsh, meanwhile, to witness impressive concentrations of dark-bellied brent geese.

Kite watching

Despite the short, cold days, midwinter is one of the best times to watch red kites. The bare trees allow for more open views across the countryside and kites must make the most of the limited daylight if they are to find sufficient food.

The red kite is a highly social bird in winter and large numbers gather in the late afternoon to roost. Over 200 birds have been counted in the air together in the Chilterns, forming one of the most impressive wildlife spectacles in England. Windy days offer the best prospects as the kites spend much more time in the air, using their long wings and forked tail to fly effortlessly over the countryside.

Communal roosting is probably an adaptation to allow more efficient foraging. Kites leave the roosts in loose groups to begin searching for food and when one bird locates a food source, the others are able to converge to share in the feast. Communal roosts may also provide other benefits such as a place where birds can interact and perhaps, meet up with potential future mates.

Thanks to the continued success of the red kite reintroduction programme, this spectacular bird is becoming a familiar sight in parts of England, and even a regular visitor to gardens (see page 14), but it was not always so. After centuries of persecution by landowners, the bird was almost wiped out by the end of the 19th century. In order to restore its numbers, the Nature Conservancy Council (now English Nature in England) and the RSPB began a reintroduction programme in 1989. Fifteen years later, populations in the **Chilterns** are well established, with 177 pairs found in 2003, and more than 1,000 birds in total.

Two more projects have since been carried out. With birds from the Chilterns and Spain released between 1995 and 1998, an expanding population of 24 pairs now exists in **Rockingham Forest**, north Northamptonshire. The *Red Kites @ Rockingham* project, in association

with RSPB and Forest Enterprise, posts live pictures of a nesting pair during the breeding season on the English Nature and RSPB websites. The pictures are also relayed to an information centre in a converted barn at Top Lodge, Fineshade, between Corby and Stamford. 2004 is the fourth year that the webcam has filmed the same pair of birds who have now raised seven young.

Although the introduction of birds only began in 1999, the Yorkshire project, based at the **Harewood Estate** near Leeds has already resulted in the establishment of a small breeding population. In 2003, the last year of releases, 16 breeding pairs were found.

This year, a new project is planned for Northumbria with the support of English Nature, the RSPB, Gateshead Council, Northumbrian Water, the National Trust and Forest Enterprise. This will involve taking birds from nests in the Chilterns and moving them to release pens in the Derwent Valley near Gateshead. Central to the project, is a community initiative intended to make kites accessible to large numbers of people. Thanks to Gateshead Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund, this now has £750,000 worth of funding to last over several years.

To find out more about the Red Kite Reintroduction Programme in England, see the booklet 'Return of the red kite'. This can be viewed on, or ordered, via the English Nature website.

Using their long wings and forked tails, red kites fly effortlessly over the countryside.

A series of red kite guided walks regularly take place at each of the three release sites. For the Chilterns, ring Cathy Rose on 01844 271306 or visit www.chilternsaonb.org/events; for Rockingham Forest, ring Forest Enterprise on 01780 444098; and for the Yorkshire Project, ring Marie Bowness on 0113 218 1040.



Red kites are highly social birds – as many as 200 have been seen at once in the Chilterns



Many red kite deaths are due to their feeding on poisoned rodents

Red kites and rodenticides

The red kite's successful re-introduction has been due in part to its ability to adapt to our modern countryside. As a scavenger, this exposes it to poisoned rodents and inappropriate food put out in gardens.

It has been known for many years that some modern anticoagulant rodenticides are so toxic that they pose a risk to other animals that feed on poisoned rodents. Red kites in England are known to have been killed in this way, and some dead birds have been found with obvious internal bleeding.

below). In order to reduce the risk to birds of prey, people are encouraged to:

- consider alternative forms of control such as trapping or the use of less toxic poisons based on warfarin or coumatetralyl, where resistance is not a problem;
- follow the product label instructions carefully whenever poisons are used; and
- carry out regular searches for dead rodents and dispose of the bodies safely by burning or burying.

In a recent initiative, Rentokil, a leading pest control company, has responded positively to the threat, saying that it will reduce its use of rodenticides by 75 per cent when carrying out rat control programmes. This is a very welcome move and should help the red kite, as well as barn owl, kestrel, buzzard and polecat populations that are also affected by secondary poisoning.

For further information, the booklet '*Rat poison and the threat to birds of prey*' is available from English Nature and the RSPB.

Between 1998 and 2001, around 30 incidents were reported involving birds of prey, especially red kites and buzzards, where it is likely that rodenticides were the cause of death.

Kites are especially vulnerable to this threat because they often feed around human settlements where rats are regularly controlled using poison. And being scavengers, they take dead rats that are likely to have been poisoned.

English Nature has worked hard to raise awareness of this issue and has produced a leaflet with the RSPB on the threat posed by rodenticides (see

Kites in the garden!

When millions of us put out food for birds in our garden, the last thing we expect is a visit from a bird of prey. Increasingly, however, people on the edges of villages and towns in the Chilterns are putting out food specifically for this purpose.

The contrast between past and present could not be more striking. Actively persecuted in the 19th Century, the birds are now viewed as a spectacle, diving down to snatch up food from within feet of the kitchen window! But there are dangers in providing too much supplementary food for kites as

it may prevent the birds from recolonising new areas and can cause nutritional problems if food is of poor quality.

Experts at the Zoological Society of London's Institute of Zoology found that several nestlings in the Chilterns this year, were suffering from a growth problem known as metabolic bone disease. This can be caused by poor nutrition, and inappropriate food put out to feed kites may be a factor. To avoid such problems, a few simple guidelines are shown below:

Feeding red kites

- Provide only small amounts of food for kites so they continue to forage for natural food. Feeding in the afternoons only will enable birds to forage naturally in the first part of the day.
- Avoid processed meats which may have potentially harmful additives such as salt.
- Limit the use of butcher's offcuts which may be excessively fatty with little skin or bone from which kites derive important nutrients.
- Whole or chopped animal carcasses are suitable for feeding kites. Dead mice may be ordered from a specialist supplier or road kills can be used, provided that sensible hygiene precautions are taken.
- Be aware that food provided for kites may attract crows or rats which is likely to be unpopular with neighbours.



Gerry Whitlow

Obituaries

Franklyn Perring 1927 - 2003

Franklyn Perring, one of the most eminent and well-respected botanists of his generation, died on 11 October 2003, aged 76.

He will be best known to many as the co-author, with Max Walters, of the immensely important British natural history publication *Atlas of the British Flora*. The Atlas was compiled by the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) and here he worked on the BSBI's so-called 'maps scheme' in 1954, recording the precise incidence of all British flowering plants. This was the first time that such a feat had been attempted.

After the Atlas's publication, Franklyn moved to English Nature's predecessor, the Nature Conservancy and was based at the Monks Wood Experimental Station, which had been set up in the early 1960s to study the effects of pollution on wildlife. He founded, and was the first head of, the Biological Records Centre, which continued the work begun in the Atlas.

Franklyn left the Biological Records Centre in 1979 to become General Secretary of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation – now the Wildlife Trusts. He remained here until his retirement in 1987 and was a founder member of the Cambridgeshire Trust.

After retiring in 1987, Franklyn and a colleague, Anne Cryer, set up Wildlife Travel, a company which took wildlife tours to Europe and beyond, the profits going to the Wildlife Trusts.

His contribution to conservation went further. Franklyn was Botanical Secretary of the Linnean Society of London from 1973 to 1978, and president of the BSBI from 1993 to 1995. He was awarded an OBE in 1988. He also found time to work on many other publications, among them the *Critical Supplement to the Atlas of the British Flora* and the *British Red Data Book of Vascular Plants*.

Frank Perring was a popular figure with his colleagues, although they could be exasperated by his intolerance of bureaucratic obstacles. They valued his infectious enthusiasm, his energy and his inexhaustible supply of ideas when it came to tackling new problems.

WHAT'S ON? GUIDE

JANUARY

JAN
25

Seal Watch Event

1030am-12.30am, Teesmouth NNR

A chance to experience the winter wildlife of Seal Sands from the shelter of British Energy's observation hide.

Contact: 01429 853325

FEBRUARY

FEB
8

Red kite walk around Eccup Reservoir

10am, Eccup Reservoir, West Yorkshire

A great opportunity to see red kites and other wildlife on this guided walk around the reservoir, a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Contact: Marie Bowness on 0113 218 1040

FEB
8

True or False walk in the Beeches

pm (to be arranged), Burnham Beeches NNR, Bucks.

Discover some of the less well-known history and stories of Burnham Beeches in this guided walk. Can you separate the fact from the fiction? A fun walk for all the family.

Booking required.

Contact: Martin Hartup on 01753 647358

FEB
10

Launch of State of Nature report

London

Publication of a key piece of English Nature research on the state of England's lowlands for wildlife. This follows previous State of Nature reports on uplands and maritime. The event is by invitation only.

FEB
19

National Bird Box Week – Building a home

2-4pm, Gibraltar Point NNR, Lincolnshire.

Bring along the kids and make a bird box to take home or put up on the reserve.

£6 per family (includes a nest box).

Contact: 01754 762677

FEB
28

Guided walk around Gait Burrows NNR

1pm – 4.30pm, Gait Burrows NNR, Lancashire

A chance to see a wide variety of Britain's native trees and shrubs in their winter form on the limestone pavement and woodland on the reserve.

Contact: Rob Petley-Jones on 01539 531604

MARCH

MAR
6

Wildlife Gardening

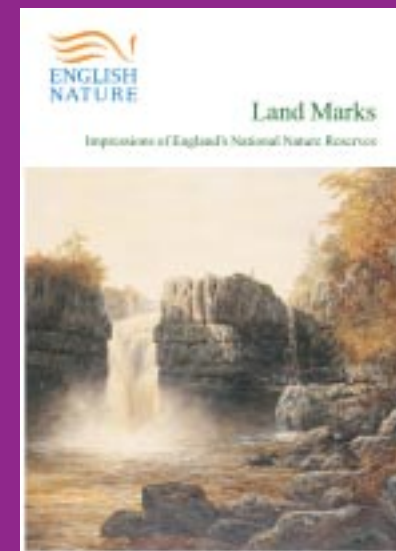
10am-1pm, Gibraltar Point NNR, Lincolnshire.

Learn how to change your garden to attract more wildlife. Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust members £3.50, non-members £7. Price includes an information pack.

Contact: 01754 762677

For information on more events, visit:
www.english-nature.org.uk/events.asp

Book review



Land Marks: Impressions of England's National Nature Reserves
Published by English Nature
£12 (ISBN 1 85716 769 4)

This book is a bit of a departure for English Nature. It looks at the history of 21 of England's National Nature Reserves (NNRs), but does not focus solely on their wildlife interest. Instead, it tells their story through the art, poems, photos and archaeology associated with the sites.

We are given an insight into how these special places have developed through the influence of people, into the unique habitats that we see today. We hear about the Lindisfarne Gospels, and how the local name for the eider duck is the 'Cuddy' duck after St Cuthbert who lived on Holy Island. I was also interested to learn how the lunar landscape of Barnack Hills came about, and of the notable buildings that are constructed of 'Barnack Rag'.

For those whose appetites are whetted by the stories of these reserves, the book gives details of opening times and accessibility. A map showing all the NNRs in England is found at the back.

The illustrations in this book are attractive. However, I was disappointed with the publication style; it would have made a wonderful present if it didn't look like a research report. It also seems a shame that the impact of striking paintings by Turner and the like is reduced by spreading them across two pages, the middle being lost in the binding. That aside, this is a refreshing new approach to the interpretation of NNRs. I look forward to volume two...

Reviewed by **Anna Gundry**

English Nature Thames and Chilterns Team



Life's a beach



Fondly described as Britain's 'Kiss me quick' section of coastline, the Thanet Coast is as valuable to wildlife as it is to pleasure-seekers. And now everyone from horse-riders to bait-diggers is contributing to its conservation.

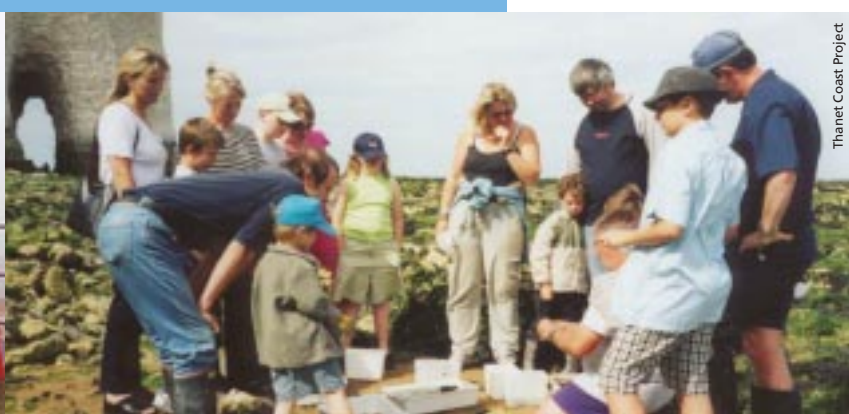
Who uses the beach?

As well as the general seashore code for all coastal users, there are specific ones for:

- horse riding
- dog walking
- powercraft activities
- wind-powered activities
- shellfish harvesting and fixed netting
- shore angling
- bait digging and collecting
- school field trips.



Kent Messenger Group



Thanet Coast Project

On some uncrowded parts of the coast, wildlife and people can happily co-exist without any problems. But at a place like Thanet – a busy stretch of shore used for countless activities, as well as being an internationally important environmental asset – a more managed approach is needed to keep everything in balance.

The Thanet Coast Project was launched to meet that need. Funded by English Nature, Thanet District Council, Environment Agency, European Regional Development Fund, Kent County Council and Southern Water, the project kicked off in June 2001, initially for two years. But its success means funding is now secured until April 2006.

As many interested parties as possible were involved in producing an overall action plan that would allow everyone to work, rest and play on the coastline, while protecting the environment at the same time. The resulting *North East Kent European Marine Sites Management Scheme* was published in 2001.

In 2002 the Thanet Coastal Codes were produced. These are a series of voluntary codes of conduct for coastal users, written by local people with the help of the project. The project is also launching a voluntary coastal wardening scheme, with local people adopting sections of the coast and reporting back on what's going on there.

"The main thing here is that we're working with people to raise awareness," said Thanet Coast Project Officer Tony Child. "It's a consensus building technique. This is the first time a series of coastal codes have been written up for an area," said Tony. "They have been turned into one leaflet so everyone can see each other's codes."

Plans are now underway to employ a second project officer, with an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, to focus on education, developing the coastal warden scheme and links with community groups.

For more information, contact the Thanet Coast Project on 01843 577 672, email thanet.coast@thanet.gov.uk

Thanet Coast and Pegwell Bay form part of a larger area called the North East Kent European marine sites, which comprises of two Sites of Special Scientific Interest, two candidate Special Areas of Conservation, a Special Protection Area, and Wetland of International Importance, under the Ramsar convention.

Together with Pegwell Bay, Thanet Coast is home to important wintering birds including turnstone and golden plover, and marine life associated with chalk cliffs, caves, reefs and sand dunes.