

ENGLISH NATURE Magazine

Issue 73

May 2004



Gardening on the wild side Why conservation starts at home

Lost in the woods
A story of man and nature in
Lathkill Dale

Farming for wildlife
This year's winners talk to us about
their success

From local tip to local treasure
The long road to an urban nature park

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

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

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

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

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

You can also learn more about us via the Internet. Our address is:
www.english-nature.org.uk



Awarded for excellence

Cover picture



Cover photographer: Peter Wakely/English Nature

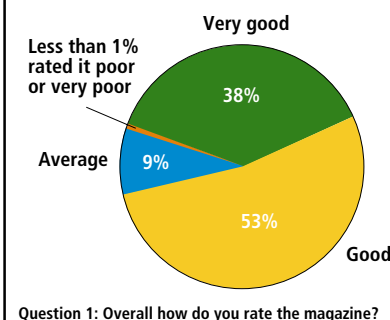
The small tortoiseshell, one of the five most reported butterflies in the Butterfly Conservation National Garden Butterfly Survey (see the feature beginning page 5)

brief update

The results are in!

A very big thank you to everyone who responded to our readership survey. Your feedback is absolutely crucial if we're to ensure that English Nature Magazine is relevant and interesting to you. The fact that 13.5% or 2,119 of you took the time to answer is also encouraging.

91% rate the magazine as good or very good...

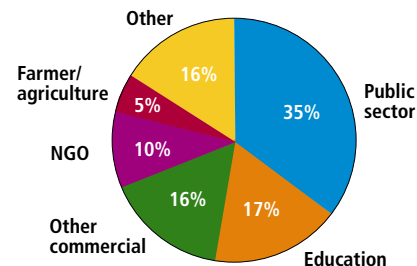


Your response was very positive. 91% of you rated the magazine as good or very good and most of you read it all. You also thought the current frequency of every other month is also about right.

However, there seems to be an opportunity to improve the balance of content. Over 50% of you would like to see more news, more examples of conservation in practice and some would like The magazine to be more 'hard-hitting', with longer and more in-depth articles. And while 89% of you think it looks nice, some question the design and use of colour, although 97% want to retain the printed format.

And who are our readers? 67% of you are male and 60% are over 50. A little over half of you live in rural areas and 53% work in the public sector or education. 72% of you

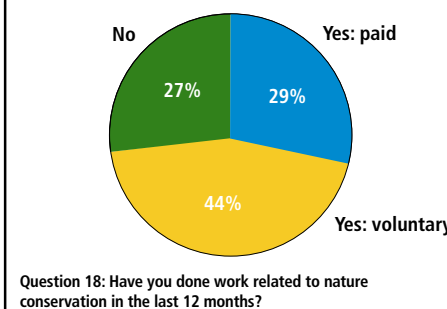
The public and education sectors are the principal areas of work



read it for general interest and most support the idea of advertising. Nearly three-quarters of you have done conservation work in the last 12 months showing that you are pretty passionate about nature and able to back up your opinions with practical experience.

We look forward to taking on board your comments.

73% have done conservation work in the last 12 months...



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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

Dibden Bay – a landmark decision for nature

Proposals to build a container port at Dibden Bay, near Southampton, have been rejected by the Government in a powerful endorsement of the importance of sites valuable for wildlife.

A key factor in the decision was the environmental impact of the proposals on the internationally protected sites. English Nature's evidence at the year-long public inquiry that the proposals would damage two Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), a Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site was accepted by the Inspector and Transport Minister, Tony McNulty, in announcing his decision. Eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) would also have been harmed if the plans were given the go ahead.

Director of Designated Sites for English Nature, Dr Andy Clements said, "The Minister for Transport has acknowledged that Associated British Ports (ABP) failed both to properly recognise the full impact that their proposals would have on wildlife and to suggest appropriate ways by which that damage would be offset."

The Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area is used by 50,000 waterbirds,

making it one of the most important places in the country for wintering wildfowl. The area is an exceptional habitat for oystercatchers and attracts plover, wigeon, curlew and lapwing. The bay also supports internationally important numbers of dark-bellied Brent geese.

Southampton Water salt marshes are home to specialist plants and flowers, such as cord grass, marsh samphire and sea purslane. The area behind the foreshore, known as 'the reclaim' is an SSSI in its own right, drawing 2,500 waterfowl, nationally rare insects, and lapwing.

"We are not out to stop port development come what may," said Dr Clements. "We believe it should be possible for the issues of nature conservation and the environment to be addressed as part of port development proposals, but feel this was not the case with Dibden. We are currently working with the ports industry to help find sustainable development solutions to the need for new port capacity. Indeed, we have agreed with ABP ways in which their proposals to develop ports on the Humber Estuary can proceed without harmful consequences for nature."

A wild read

Wildlife Garden at the Natural History Museum

By Roy Vickery, Published 13 June 2004.

Spend a year in the Wildlife Garden in the company of herons, foxes, bats, spiders and moths. Follow the season from the catkins, yellow primroses and tadpoles of spring through to winter, when mosses and red holly berries offer the only colour. Each stage in the garden's annual cycle is brought to life with the help of a lovely selection of colour photographs on every page. Since it was created 10 years ago, the garden has quickly developed into a precious resource for a number of native species. Within a single acre of land, the museum has created a range of different habitats such as meadow, heathland and woodland.

This book is an ideal gift for all nature-lovers and gardeners. Your guide is Roy Vickery, a museum botanist who has been involved with the Wildlife Garden since its early days.



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Editorial

We are a nation of gardeners, and love our gardens, woods and trees.

Woods and gardens have a vital connection, even in towns and cities. Many of our garden birds – blackbirds, robins, thrushes, wrens, tits and tawny owls, as well as mammals like badgers, weasels, woodmice and hedgehogs – love our gardens because they are miniature versions of the natural wooded countryside. See pages 4 and 5 for advice on how to improve your garden for wildlife this summer.

The wildlife garden at the Natural History Museum is an inspiration to anyone who wants to create a space for wild plants and animals. See 'A wild read' adjacent.

In 'Lost in the woods' on pages 6 and 7 we hear how an old ruin set in the heart of ancient Lathkill Dale woods is being restored through a successful partnership between English Nature and English Heritage. Partnerships are also critical to the story on pages 10 and 11, where a great one saved a 50 hectare slice of the Wyre Forest, bursting with wildlife, from becoming roadside verge.

On pages 12 to 14 we feature the Farming for Wildlife award winners – gutsy and inspirational farmers who prove that there's a place for conservation in the countryside.

I hope you enjoy reading this May issue of the Magazine. As always, I enjoy hearing from you. Please get in touch.



Gardening on the wild side

What to do and see in May



Foxglove

- May is the greenest month of the year and many plants are in flower. Bumblebees gather the pollen of geraniums and foxgloves and the flowers of chives will attract bees and some butterflies.
- Hedgehogs are courting and mating now so make sure your garden is free from hazards such as loose netting and slug pellets. Hedgehogs, as well as thrushes, shrews and ground beetles, feast on slugs so they should become less of a problem.

Gardens are extensions of our homes as well as being important to wildlife. Making just a few changes in your garden could help it become a wildlife haven.

BBC Gardener's World Live

Come and join English Nature's giant garden party. Share a slice of cake with the toad, bumblebee, song thrush, grass snake and hedgehog at Gardener's World Live show at Birmingham's NEC, which runs from Wednesday 16 to Sunday 20 June.

English Nature's stand will have specialists on hand ready to answer your questions and queries on gardening with wildlife and other nature issues.

See www.bbcgardenersworldlive.co.uk for more details.

Don't take the peat

90% of rare lowland raised peatbog has been lost over the last 40 years due to extraction, largely for garden use. The impact on biodiversity has been devastating and in 2002, the Government funded the cessation of peat extraction on England's three largest bogs, with plans to restore them.

As a strong supporter of using alternatives to peat and peat-based products, English Nature is publishing a guide called *Composting and peat free gardening* in association with the Henry Doubleday

Research Association. This sets out an action plan on how to avoid using peat, with particular emphasis on making your own compost and leaf mould, as well as advice on selecting or making your own compost bin.

To obtain a copy, call English Nature's Enquiry Service on 01733 455100. Alternatively, visit www.english-nature.org.uk to find out what else English Nature is doing to reduce the demand for peat.

Hunting down the minibeasts

Butterflies, moths, bugs, beetles, worms, snails, spiders – the average garden supports many thousands of minibeasts. Packed with microhabitats, you can expect to see scores of creatures in a single day.

To help in the hunt, English Nature has launched *Minibeasts in the garden*. A comprehensive guidebook to the species, it shows where to find them and has plenty of full colour pictures to show you exactly what to look for.

To obtain a copy, call English Nature's Enquiry Service on 01733 455100.

Creating a wildflower meadow

The scent of flowers and freshly cut hay and the sleepy drone of bees – a remedy for the stresses of daily life and now within grasp of many according to a new publication by English Nature.

How to create a wildflower meadow in your garden looks at the practical reasons for turning a few square metres over to this valuable habitat and advice is given on preparing the soil and sowing seed. There is also a section on selecting plants and where they will best thrive.

To obtain a copy, call English Nature's Enquiry Service on 01733 455100.



Wildflowers planted from seed

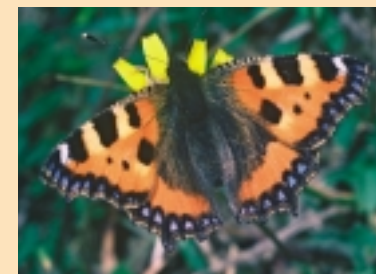
The butterfly effect

Butterfly Conservation has just published the results of its national garden butterfly survey with English Nature's support. The aim of the survey was to raise awareness of the decline of butterflies and moths and how people can help conserve these beautiful creatures.

Thousands of people helped with the survey. Last year's record-breaking temperatures proved to be a real benefit to butterflies and resulted in a complete change in the ranking of the top five garden butterflies. Red admiral took the top spot followed by large and small whites, small tortoiseshell and painted lady.

Almost all the species in the survey were seen in more gardens than the year before, with the painted lady leaping from being spotted in 53% of gardens in 2002, to 83% last year.

For more ideas on how to making your garden more butterfly-friendly, go direct to Butterfly Conservation's web page at www.butterfly-conservation.org



Small tortoiseshell

Nature in the garden

English Nature has recently launched *Nature in the Garden* within the Wildlife section of its website (www.english-nature.org.uk/Nature_In_The_Garden/).

It provides details on what to see and do in your garden each month, hints on getting children involved (and keeping them entertained), and what nature is doing in bigger green spaces such as parks. There are also top tips on how to garden for wildlife. Key things you can do include:

- introducing plants that attract natural predators;
- making your own compost (see 'Don't take the peat' opposite);
- creating a pond;
- planting native flowers, shrubs and trees;
- feeding the birds.

Take a look at the virtual garden tour, which allows viewers to manoeuvre around a typical garden while advice on what to do and things to look out for is highlighted on-screen.

What to do and see in June

- If you have an area of cowslips or bulbs in grass – a spring meadow – this can be cut at the end of the month as long as the seeds have fallen. If not, wait until July. Whenever you cut, make sure the hay is raked off thoroughly once it has dried for a few days.
- Keep your garden pond topped up now with rainwater if you have saved some. Young frogs and toads are developing and need to be able to get out of the water easily. If the water level is low, this may not be possible. They are also easy prey, especially for blackbirds. If you have paving or open pond edges with no hiding places, try putting some logs close to the water to allow them to find shelter.
- If your roses are suffering from aphids this month, you can encourage blue tits and great tits to eat them. Try hanging a small feeder of sunflower hearts amongst the roses to encourage the birds to the right place.



Lost in the woods

Peter Wakely/English Nature

The River Lathkill is fringed by ash woods through the eastern section of the NNR

Past the western reaches of Lathkill Dale, in the Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve (NNR), the grassland soon gives way to wooded slopes, fringing the banks of the River Lathkill all the way to the village of Over Haddon. The woods hide the remains of extensive lead workings – this part of the Peak District has been mined for the metal since Roman times. In Lathkill Dale, however, the workings are evidence of a headlong rush that took place in the first and middle parts of the 19th century. The area is peppered with old shafts and it is said that some 15 miles of tunnel radiate out from the floor of the dale. The abundance of trees all about provided a ready source of timber for the inexhaustible demand for pit props. But it is the efforts taken to keep the mines dry that are the industry's lasting legacy beneath the canopy.

On the north bank of the river stands the remains of a once powerful Cornish beam engine, capable of pumping water from a depth of 50 metres at such force that it looked like 'new milk'. On the south bank, meanwhile, Bateman's House hides evidence of a more mysterious kind – a vertical shaft sits directly beneath the building.

Records suggest that in 1830, James Bateman, company agent for the Lathkill Dale Mine Company, helped install an experimental engine here, one powered by a 'leat' or channel bringing water from a pool a kilometre upstream. This produced up to 130 horsepower and 25.5 pounds of pressure per square inch – more than enough to keep the Lathkill mine dry.

Weighing some seven tons, the pump needed to be winched into position and it is likely that the building above originally assisted in the process. As the pump was something of a curiosity, the building also conveniently shielded it from prying eyes.

From here, Bateman was able to oversee the work of the company – up to 120 men during its most active period between 1824 and 1842. It is likely that on payday the men gathered at the door to receive their salary of 2 shillings per day from him.



Lathkill Dale is a 'Spotlight' reserve, attracting some 100,000 visitors annually

CLW Porter Collection (right) Richard Sheppard, Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit, Nottingham University (far right)



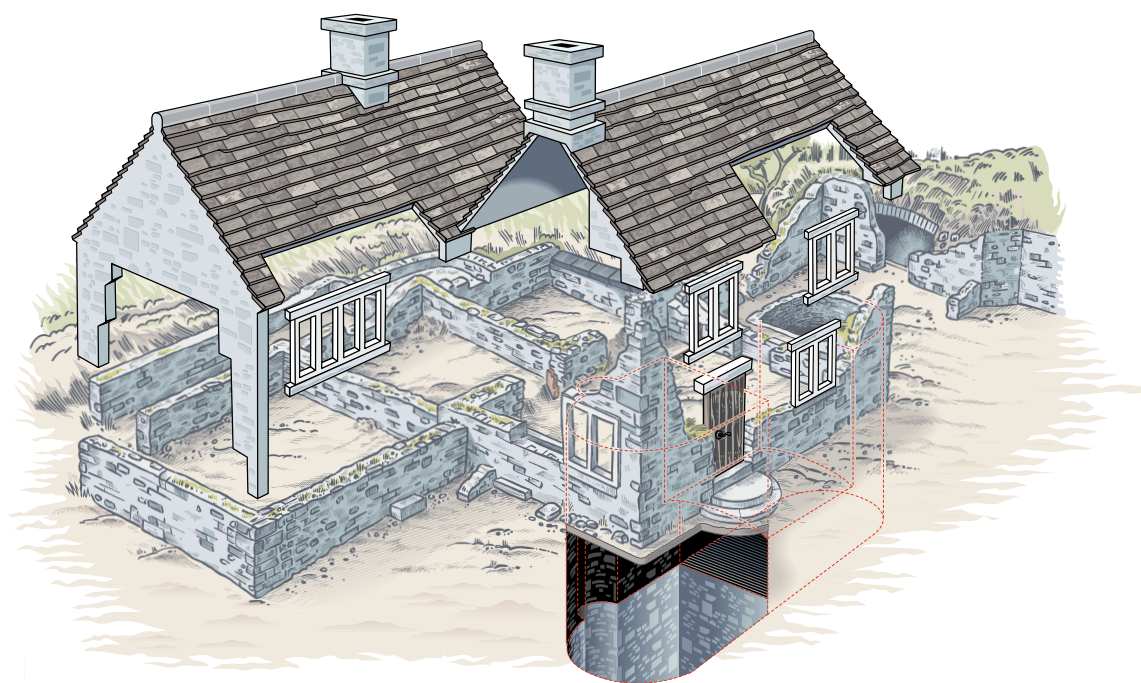
Bateman's House as it was in the fifties (above left) and part way through restoration (above right)



He also adapted this once industrial building into a family home. His children no doubt ate and played here and outside he grew a garden of which he became justifiably proud. But living – quite literally – on top of his work sometimes made home life difficult, even unsettling. Story has it that while sweeping the living room one day, Mrs Bateman put her broom straight through the floor and into the shaft below.

Today, visitors can descend stairs to view that shaft, read about Lathkill Dale's mining past and learn about the relationship between people and nature. This is the work of a partnership between English Nature and English Heritage, a unique project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund that brings together many different aspects of reserve management (see right).

Paul Glendell/English Nature



Bateman's House was built on top of a vertical shaft that can still be visited today. This was once thought to contain a massive pump to control flooding in the mine.

CDSE/English Nature

Man and nature

English Nature is not a specialist in industrial archaeology. So why have we been working with English Heritage to conserve Bateman's House?

The partnership mirrors the close relationship between nature and the industrial legacy of the dale. Rather than restore Bateman's House to a completed structure, both partners have played to their strengths and created an evocative ruin that will slowly be absorbed into the landscape and become a haven for wildlife and plantlife.

With the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, we have been able to clear the rooms of shoulder-high rubble and re-point the two remaining gables with traditional lime mortar. We have also sealed the walls with 'soft topping' or turf, preventing water from penetrating the structure during the winter months and causing frost damage. Already, plants such as yellow archangel, red campion, bugle and herb Robert are starting to establish themselves in and around the building and wrens have also been sighted nesting here.

An equally important objective has been to improve access and understanding of the site. With this in mind we have built a new oak bridge across the river between the main path and the house. There is also a new set of stairs by which visitors can descend below the house and glimpse the empty pumping shaft beneath. Here visitors now have to hand-crank a generator to power the underground lighting if they want to see the shaft and interpretation panel. Further panels have been erected in the house above and next to the remains of the Cornish beam engine nearby.

Perhaps the most significant point about the project though is the way it brings together so many different aspects of managing a spotlight NNR – people, nature and our man-made heritage. The project is a good example of how partner organisations can work together to provide a practical, joined-up solution.

Woods, gardens and deer



Anne Kelaart

"Opening my curtains the other morning I was confronted with the most beautiful sight of nineteen fallow deer on my lawn. They were quite unfazed by the movement at the window and, indeed, here in the Chilterns, their erstwhile reticent behaviour has changed dramatically in the last 10 years.

"So numerous are they nowadays that they no longer shyly hug the outskirts of the woods, but graze boldly at any time of day in the middle of large arable fields or any garden close by. Deer are unpopular with foresters and gardeners alike but goodness, they are lovely to look at first thing in the morning.

"What chance have our new trees got with this ravaging army? If my roses are anything to go by – very little. In years to come, whose habitats will we have sacrificed to these beautiful creatures? Should we encourage deer control? To my mind it is obvious that we should. However, there is an enormous job to do here in explaining the necessity to those who cannot believe that one can both kill and respect an animal. Quite the best solution would be to promote venison. It is, after all, an extremely healthy and delicious meat with the built-in advantage of the ultimate free-range life for the deer.

"Checks and balances have always been necessary. Can we carry people with us on this one?"

Anne Kelaart, Council Member

Anne has been a farmer in Oxfordshire since 1981, when she took over the family farm. She has been active both on her own farm and in her local area in promoting wildlife-friendly agriculture.

How our wildwoods used to look

England's wildwood may not have been as thick and impenetrable as once thought. A new project is exploring whether grazing animals could be used to create and maintain mixed landscapes of woodland, scrub and open grassland rich in wildlife.

Recently Frans Vera, a Dutch ecologist, challenged accepted ideas of what the natural forest was like. He proposed that the wildwood that once covered much of western Europe may actually have been rather open, not unlike wood-pasture in fact. There is little doubt that the role of large animals, such as the (now extinct) wild ox, in shaping forests has been underestimated, but whether much of Britain would really have been open parkland is debatable.

Vera and his colleagues suggest that rich mixed landscapes could be created and maintained on a big scale by using free-ranging cattle and other large herbivores. The 5,000 hectare reserve at Oostvaardersplassen in the Netherlands is put forward as an example. Now English Nature is looking to see if such an approach would be appropriate in Britain.

"The project we have established has two aims," said Rebecca Isted of English Nature's Terrestrial Wildlife Team. "The first is to look back into the past: to explore the evidence for and against much of Britain having a relatively open forest cover some 7,000 - 10,000 years ago. This will be done primarily through an analysis of the remains of fossil insects."



Galloway cattle grazing in broadleaved woodland

Professor Paul Buckland of Bournemouth University and ECUS Ltd will be working on this part of the project.

"The second part is more concerned with the future use of large grazing animals as part of conservation management of existing wood-pastures and new mixed landscapes. Dr James Bullock from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology are looking at questions such as the type and density of animals that might be used, and how they should be treated, including issues such as animal welfare and public safety issues."

Some private and state landowners are already seriously interested in looking at free-ranging grazing systems such as this as a means of managing large sites. This project will help to provide sound scientific and practical evidence as to how they might go forward with such plans.

Beneath the horse chestnut tree

Traditional methods and community involvement make this a project for people and wildlife.

A winter's day in Linthorpe Cemetery – you would expect few places to be quieter. Except, surprisingly, you can hear the unexpected pounding of horses' hooves. Tees, a towering chestnut shire horse of 17.2 hands, is moving timber as part of an environmentally sensitive tree management operation.

Linthorpe Cemetery was declared a Local Nature Reserve in 2003 under English Nature's Wildspace! Grant scheme. The 21-hectare site is situated in central Middlesbrough and provides a tranquil wooded oasis in a heavily built-up area. Its location also makes it a valuable breeding and roosting site for resident and migratory birds, such as tawny owls, goldcrests and redwings.

But the trees were all Victorian plantings and by 2003 this has resulted in a crowded, even-age crop of mature, mainly horse-chestnut trees with little in the way of young timber. To ensure the longevity of the woodland and its wildlife value, a much broader mix of species and age was needed. Middlesbrough Wildspace! Officer Sue Antrobus oversaw a nature conservation plan, now into its second year of implementation.

"We knew the plan had to take into account the landscape character of the site, public perception and the practical consideration of preserving Victorian graves," she said. "The work was planned over a 10-year period so that any changes were gradual and therefore more acceptable to the general public."

"The trees were dismantled by specialist tree surgeons rather than felled and the graves protected by hay bales. Tees was then used to extract the timber as he was more nimble at negotiating graves than



Tees, the chestnut shire horse, was a big attraction for the local community

a tractor and didn't churn up the burial lawns and wildflower meadows."

To ensure that local people not only understood why the work was carried out, but also supported it, the trees for removal were selected in full consultation with local group The Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery. An explanatory leaflet was also produced and widely distributed. Funding was provided by the Wildspace! Grant scheme and Middlesbrough Council's Bereavement Services.

"People were given the opportunity in advance of the work to view maps and plans and to be shown around the site to discuss the planned work," Sue added. "It was amazing how much interest there was in Tees as a working horse. He got plenty of attention from the local press, radio and TV. People would also appear from all corners of the cemetery with carrots and peppermints. Whilst

they admired the horse I could then explain the tree work."

All of the wood has since been put to good use. Tees has delivered trunks, carved by one of the woodsmen into animal shapes, to local schools. Smaller pieces of horse chestnut, meanwhile, have been donated to local woodturning groups. These are returning the favour by giving wood-turning demonstrations at the cemetery's annual open day in July. The remainder has been chipped and used to mulch a newly-planted hedge or to suppress weeds on newer graves.

During the work, over 350 children from six schools visited the cemetery on educational trips, planting snowdrops and learning about the uses of timber. "Some of these children live in streets that have no rear or front gardens and have little access to the wider countryside," continued Sue. "For them, meeting Tees was a real treat."

Pooling resources

Just sometimes, partnerships really can exceed the sum of their parts. Take Hurcott and Podmore Pools Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). What might once have become roadside verge is now a beautiful community space.

Sitting on the fringes of Kidderminster's urban and industrial belt, the Hurcott and Podmore Pools SSSI acts as a green lung for local residents. Its 50 hectares comprise two large pools and an extensive wet woodland area plus adjoining broadleaved woodland, making this an important habitat for bird life. More than 30 species of birds breed here, including great crested grebe, little grebe, kingfisher and reed warbler. In addition, its recent designation as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR), with more than 150,000 local visitors a year, makes it a very valuable green space.

This is all a far cry from just a few years ago when it belonged to the Highways Agency, and was one of many parcels of land purchased along the route of a proposed trunk road. Fortunately in this case, the development was postponed indefinitely and a purchaser sought, at which point the Minister for Farming, Food and Sustainable Energy, Lord Whitty, intervened.

"This quickly opened the door for negotiations between the Highways Agency, the New Opportunities Fund,

Wyre Forest District Council and ourselves," said Rob Williams, Area Manager for

English Nature. "As well as its wildlife value, one of the main attractions of Hurcott and Podmore Pools was its close proximity to some pretty deprived urban communities. It also fitted very neatly into the Council's pattern of circular walks up and down the valley. Everyone around the table saw the potential of the land for the local community and wildlife and wanted a successful outcome."

With substantial financial backing by the New Opportunities Fund and English Nature, the purchase was secured and in 2001, Hurcott and Podmore Pools came under the ownership of Wyre Forest District Council.

"There was plenty to consider," added Paul Allen, Countryside and Conservation Officer with the Council. "We knew it would be well used so we had to think about creating the maximum access potential and infrastructure for visitors, while having the minimal impact on wildlife. Crucial to this was English Nature's Wildspace! grant of £25,000 funded through the New Opportunities Fund.

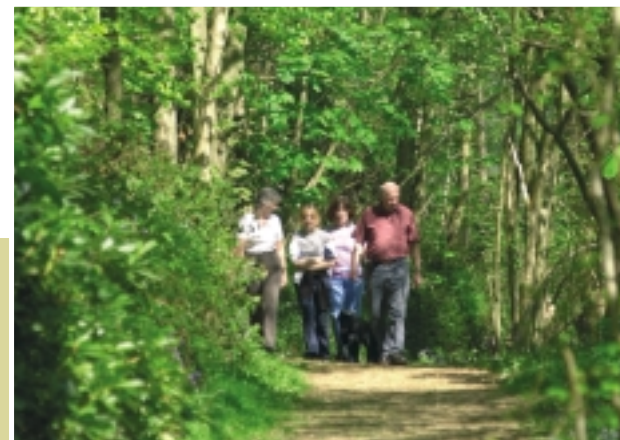
"Once this was awarded in July 2001, we began work to move the paths away from areas of wet woodland and the very edge of the lake, while still giving walkers great views. We also improved disabled access and wanted to encourage a bit of exploration by visitors. We did this by creating special features around the Reserve: 'giant's' chairs carved out of large tree trunks, bird viewing stands and a spooky 'grotto' in the woods. When people see these on our interpretation panels they get quite excited!"

"Everyone around the table saw the potential of the land for the local community and wildlife and wanted a successful outcome."

"Paul's creative touch has turned the site into a fantastic place for people of all ages to come and explore," added Shirine Voller of English Nature's Wildspace! Grant Management Team. "The Wildspace! Grant scheme is really keen to support such entrepreneurial projects."



The Giant's Chairs – a popular community spot



More than 150,000 local visitors come each year

Local enjoyment of the LNR is one thing, but it has been just as important to encourage local participation in its maintenance. "Yes, we had already put together plans for managing the habitat with the input of English Nature and the Forestry Authority," continued Paul, "but for the real eyes and ears on the ground we were relying on locals."

A masterstroke move was to reduce the number of fishing spots on the main lake from 50 to 12. Not only has this reduced the impact on the habitat, but by awarding a local angling club exclusive access to these spots, the Council has found itself friends who help keep the area clear of litter and attractive to people and wildlife. Another group of volunteers helps with coppicing work on the site.

"This has been a wonderful project, especially the involvement of the local community," said John Taylor, the New Opportunities Fund West Midlands Regional Manager. "The New Opportunities Fund recognises that projects such as these can add real value to the local communities, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

"There is much that has already been achieved in improving the quality of the local environment in the West Midlands, but there is still more to do and regional policy makers and funders need to recognise the value of projects like this one."

Now is the time for... forest flora

With the trees now in new leaf, this is the time to visit our woodlands. Yet even beneath a canopy of green, the forest floor provides a surprising breadth of colour. Forestry and Woodlands Officer, Emma Goldberg explains.



Early purple orchid

It's almost something of a cliché to see bluebells on a forest walk. But the sight of a deep blue carpet amidst beech or oak trees still can't fail to take your breath away.

Their juice was once used to starch Elizabethan collars, but bluebells are now protected from commercial exploitation by law. Unfortunately, the native English bluebell is still under threat from paler Spanish and hybrid varieties. Increasingly found in the wild, these invaders are best identified by their upright, rather than drooping, stems.

But blue is not the only colour here. Wild garlic, with its heady scent, can also be found in thick, creamy droves – edible, lush, green leaves surrounding a creamy white head of flowers. Less showy, but equally fond of shady places, is the yellow pimpernel, with its pretty star-shaped blooms.

Preferring grassy rides under open sky, the early purple orchid is arguably one of the most unusual woodland flowers. Wild orchids have perhaps the greatest variety of flower shape of any plant family. In some cases colour and lip shape have evolved to mimic certain female insects to attract the male who will pollinate the flower.

Farming for wildlife

Modern and commercial farming can go hand in hand with conservation. This was the message from this year's English Nature Farming for Wildlife Award.

The English Nature Farming for Wildlife Award is one of seven within the National Farmers' Union Farming Excellence Awards. It recognises achievements in nature conservation and its prize money funds continuing conservation work on winning farms.

"I would like to congratulate Tom Meikle on winning the English Nature farming for Wildlife Award. His success in creating so many new wildlife habitats, and his commitment and enthusiasm for conservation, is an example to us all."

Sir Martin Doughty, English Nature Chair



Tom Meikle

Winner Tom Meikle, Lower Freelands Farm, Worcestershire

Tom's farm or farms – there are two of them – sit next to the River Avon and cover a total of around 300 acres. The farm business is based on the principles of integrated farm management, and the main crops grown here are sugar beet, salad onions, dwarf beans, barley and wheat. "My father started planting trees as far back as 50 years ago and is still planting them now. That's where my interest in wildlife came from. We try to balance the requirement of running a profitable business with responsibility and sensitivity to the environment" said Tom.

Farming and wildlife – finding the right fit

Tom's early exposure to wildlife farming can be seen everywhere in his methods. In fact, it's hard to know where to begin.

What are field margins and beetle banks?

A field margin is a two to six metre strip of land lying between arable crops and the field boundary, while a beetle bank is a similar strip lying across an arable field.

Left uncultivated, or reseeded with an appropriate seed mix, these can prove valuable habitats for wildflowers and different species of invertebrate such as butterflies and grasshoppers. These in turn attract small mammals, such as mice and voles, and birds including barn owls and grey partridges.

As well as habitats in themselves, field margins and beetle banks allow wildlife to move from one habitat to another, helping to sustain the countryside's biodiversity.



Old wood stacked for birds and butterflies

"Tom has proved that environmental sensitivity and countryside stewardship can go hand in hand with running a profitable and diverse farm business."

Tim Bennett, NFU President

"The first place to start is field margins (see left), something I've done as part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The question for me was 'how can I really ensure they give the biggest benefit for wildlife?'. We therefore experimented with two and six metre margins, with or without wildflowers. With inspiration and advice from Marek Nowakowski from the Farmed Environment Company and Peter Thompson of the Game Conservancy, we settled on six metre margins – two metres of tussocky grass and four metres of short grass/wildflower mix. The tussocky grass is left uncut and the grass with wildflower is cut late for hay. This has

allowed hedge-cutting in January/early February without damage to the crops and has reduced the invasion of wild oats into the seed crops. The margins also provide a good habitat for insects, nest sites for grey partridges, corn buntings and yellowhammers, and a habitat for field voles and mice.



Field margins can prove valuable habitats for invertebrates

"Crops are spread around the farm and we've also tried to divide large fields into smaller ones with beetle banks (see far left). The first was created 40 years ago and we've added four more. In addition, we worked extensively to restore hedgerows around the farm.

"And I've carried on what my father started by increasing the amount of woodland. With 180 willows on the farm, I've stacked pollarded willow timber to create habitat for invertebrates, nesting sites for blackbirds, thrushes, wrens....and hibernation sites for moths, butterflies and amphibians!

"Then there are the ponds. We have put in three, restored a couple of others and have created three hibernaculas for crested newts."

And the benefit for wildlife?

"I'm very proud of what we've achieved and it was great to hear confirmation of that from someone else! An RSPB volunteer surveyed the farm in 2002 and reported seeing corn buntings, skylarks, lapwings, grey partridge, turtle doves, linnets, reed buntings, bullfinches and spotted flycatchers – all species listed on the Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan."

What will you do with the £6,000 prize money from English Nature?

"When one of the farms was built, the drains from the pig pens and cow sheds fed directly into a nearby pond. The animals have gone now and I would like to restore the pond to a living ecosystem. I'm planning to do that by creating a reed bed which would filter any future run-off from the yard."

Congratulations also to the regional winners:

East Midlands
Andrew Tuxworth, Flintwood Farm, Horncastle

North East
Chris Goodall & Tim Paxman, Partridge Hill Farm, Austerfield (Doncaster)

South West
Colin Coward, Mere Down Farm, Warminster

South East
Paul Warburton, North Farm, Shillingford

Runner-up Martin Baird, Red Hall Farm, Cumbria

Martin's 180-acre dairy farm near Wigton is a place of strong contrasts. This is very much a commercial operation, with 115 acres of grazing land managed intensively to support a herd of 100 cows. Yet Martin has also managed to squeeze the most out of his land for wildlife too. "Intensive farming and intensive conservation," as he describes it.

The best of both worlds

"Most of my inspiration has come through an interest in game shooting. I read about what the Game Conservancy was doing in terms of wild bird cover and thought 'I could do that'. Under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme I have been able to leave six acres of kale, quinoa and linseed mix unharvested, effectively creating a massive bird table. This is split up into a number of blocks over the farm to help create several partridge territories.



Tree sparrow

"We now have five acres of fodder beet to provide additional feed for the cows, and cover and food for game and farm birds. I leave around 10% unharvested during the winter to sustain the birds and put sheep on in March to clean up. It's an unconventional approach, but nothing is wasted."

Like Tom, Martin has also introduced margins across his farm and laid seven kilometres of hedgerow.

"Just as important has been showing people what can be done for wildlife on a farm such as this. In January

we hosted a farm walk for Cumbria Bird Club, expecting just five or six people to turn up. I was stunned when 28 arrived! Everyone enjoyed it and it's something that I'm looking to repeat.

"This is my way of promoting the fact that farmers do care about the countryside and are doing a great deal to help declining species. The club is run by a friend of mine, Peter Ulrich, whom I met while working on an Osprey protection initiative in the Lake District, following the Foot and Mouth outbreak. It was actually there that I picked up a copy of English Nature Magazine and found out about the Farming for Wildlife Award in the first place!"

And the benefit for wildlife?

"Since 1997 I have recorded 85 species of bird on the farm. Three pairs of grey partridge established themselves last spring, while the three ponds have hosted mallard, teal and the occasional widgeon and shoveller.

"The wild bird cover is mostly for winter feed and I have seen flocks of linnets, chaffinches, greenfinches, tree sparrows and wood pigeon there. I've also been able to add great spotted woodpecker, treecreeper and woodcock to the list since fencing off two ghylls and planting young oak and rowan among the old, mature and dead trees."

What will you do with the £3,000 prize money from English Nature?

"I've so many ideas, but my current plan is to make my yard a real haven for common farm birds. It's currently a big heap of rubble, but by landscaping it and putting in a large birdhouse, I'm hoping to attract birds such as house sparrows as their numbers have been declining over the last 20 years."



Martin Baird

NFU

CAP reform update

Defra is working to ensure that it is ready to roll out the new Single Farm Payment system in 2005. Ministers have decided that the payment in England will be based on how much farmland an applicant controls, adjusted initially to reflect their historic subsidy receipts. The payment will not be linked to any particular farming activity, although it will be conditional on certain basic environmental standards ("cross compliance"). English Nature is helping Defra develop these conditions, which will focus on reducing the impact of environmentally damaging activities.

We have a number of concerns over anomalies created by the new Single Farm Payment, particularly the possible exclusion of many traditional orchards, which support important wildlife species. This has reinforced English Nature's view that while the Single Farm Payment represents a useful step towards fundamental reform of the CAP, it does not go far enough, is not sustainable in the longer term and we need further progress towards shifting more CAP support into agri-environment and rural development schemes.

Meantime, Defra has announced the outline of the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) which will operate from 2005. This will include an Entry Level Scheme, open to all land managers and designed to reward basic environmental provision; and a Higher Level Scheme delivering additional environmental benefits, for example on SSSIs.

English Nature welcomes the development of the new ESS which, unlike the Single Farm Payment, will create incentives for farmers to provide the environmental services that society wants. We are urging that the shift of funding towards such a system is speeded up, and we are working with our partner agencies in the UK and with WWF (Europe) on a major new project to set out in detail what a reformed Common Rural Policy might look like.

WHAT'S ON? GUIDE

MAY

MAY
29

Moths of the Mosses Night Event

9 pm, Manor House, Fenn's, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses NNR, Shropshire
Belated celebration of National Moth Night (22 May). Advance booking only.

Contact: Joan Daniels on 01948 880362 (weekdays) or 07974 784799 (weekends). Alternatively, visit www.nationalmothnight.info/

MAY
29
-
JUNE
6

Sherwood Golden Jubilee week

Sherwood Forest NNR, Nottinghamshire

Join rangers for a week of events celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Sherwood Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Activities include self-guided and guided walks around the site, SSSI quiz, minibeast hunt and nightjar ramble.

Contact: Izy Banton, 01623 823202

JUNE

JUNE
3

Pond dipping

2.00, Rimac car park, Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes NNR, Lincolnshire
Chance for children – and grown-ups – to discover water boatman, whirligig beetles and ramshorns.

Contact: Roger Briggs on 01507 338611

JUNE
4-6

Garden Festival at Holker Hall

10.00, Holker Hall, Nr Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria

Meet English Nature's Cumbria team at the show for advice and displays on wildlife-friendly gardening. A range of children's activities will also be taking place.

Contact: For specific English Nature queries call Helen Johnston on 01539 792800. For more details of the event or to book visit www.holker-hall.co.uk

JUNE
27

Meadow Magic at Gowk Bank

2.00, Gowk Bank NNR entrance, north of Gilsland, Cumbria

A special walk in conjunction with the Flora of the Fells Project to celebrate hay meadows, one of Cumbria's rarest habitats. Advance booking only.

Contact: Cassie Brockbank on 01539 720788 or visit www.floraofthefells.com

JULY

JULY
10

How the NNR is managed today

10.00, Widdybank track gate, Moor House-Upper Teesdale NNR, Cumbria and Durham

Guided walk around the Reserve to see the hay meadows, a herd of Galloway cattle that contribute to plant conservation and meet a farmer who tenants part of the land. Advance booking only.

Contact: Heather McCarty on 01833 622374

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

From local tip to local treasure



The Friends of St. Nicholas Fields

The road from urban tip to Local Nature Reserve at St Nicholas Fields in York has been long and hard. But it has also delivered much more than anyone could have expected.

Broken glass, leaking oilcans and household rubbish – the legacy of 20 years' service as a rubbish tip. Yet despite the debris, plants and trees were slowly introducing an element of nature to Tang Hall Tip and it hadn't gone unnoticed. When plans were unveiled to turn it into an industrial estate, a number of locals began a campaign to show the community a better option for its future.

That was the start of what became a 16-year journey, the most recent milestone being the site's designation in February as St Nicholas Fields Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

Some 22 acres in size, it is now a rich mixture of habitats and has been developed with and for the local community. A butterfly walk, stone circle and adventure playground have been built. There's also the York Environmental Community Centre, one of the first sustainable public buildings in Britain (see box).

"The community has been involved from the very start," said Gordon Campbell-Thomas of the Friends of St Nicholas Fields. "We drummed up their support to save the site. Once we had set up a service agreement with the Council and could plan the work, people could get stuck into developing the site itself. We really were creating it from scratch."

Funding has come from a variety of sources, including the City of York Council, the National Lotteries Charities Board, waste management firm – Yorwaste, and, recently, the Wildspace! Grant scheme administered by English Nature. This last grant has paid for a dedicated LNR officer, Stephen Whittaker, to promote and develop St Nicholas Fields and other LNRs in York.

"We work very closely with local schools," said Stephen, "and actively invite them to visit the site on a regular basis."

One such is English Martyrs School, which came earlier this month for its second visit. "A trip to St Nicholas Fields is invaluable," added teacher Christine Johnson. "It provides children with the opportunity to benefit from a team of experts, whilst learning through a hands-on approach, in a safe and stimulating environment."

"We've also recently developed a sustainable management plan for the LNR," continued Stephen, "one that highlights specific actions to maintain the various habitats for the future."

"That's why the LNR designation is so important," added Gordon. "It's an endorsement of the work that's being done here and a sign that this park will still be here in many years' time."



The Friends of St. Nicholas Fields

How the site used to look (left); Stephen Whittaker with local children (top); tree planting volunteers (middle); visitors outside the Eco Centre (bottom).

A lesson in sustainable development

Part-funded by the National Lottery Charities Board, York Environmental Community Centre – Eco Centre – is a truly sustainable initiative. Energy is generated by the wind and sun; drinking water is collected from the roof and purified and the building shell is triple insulated to conserve heat. It's a model that has since been part-adopted by 18 houses backing onto the Reserve.

Just as important, the building has become an important local resource. The centre runs environmental education courses for schools across the city and is also the focal point for a community composting and recycling scheme. Plastic, glass, paper, cans and garden waste are all collected locally and sorted for recycling. The scheme currently serves 1,000 households although there are plans to extend this to 5,000.