ENGLISH NATURE

ENGLISH NATURE Magazine

Issue 78 March 2005

The human touch

Conserving our heritage

Spring at North Meadow
Enjoy floral glory on the NNR

Green payments
New agri-environment scheme unveiled

Farming for conservation
We meet a couple with a love for the land

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English Nature is the statutory body that 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.

We publish English Nature Magazine six times a year. The views expressed in it by individuals are not necessarily those of English Nature.

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We also have offices across the country, where our staff deal with local nature conservation issues. You can find details of your nearest office by ringing our national office (above) or from our Facts and Figures leaflet. This is free from our Enquiry Service, tel: 01733 455100 or email: enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

You can also find out more about us from our website: **www.english-nature.org.uk**

Cover picture by Peter Wakely

A colourful display of wildflowers makes the North Meadow NNR well worth a visit in Spring. (NNR Focus p8–9)

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 you would like to add or remove your name from our mailing list for this magazine, please contact Alison Eley, IMT, English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA or email: **alison.eley@english-nature.org.uk**.

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Issue 78
March 2005

brief update

Cash poured into wetlands

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Geese fly over North Norfolk Coast SSSI

Extra money is being made available to improve the quality of England's most important and fragile wetland habitats.

An estimated £2.5 million of Defra funding, announced by Environment Minister Elliot Morley, will be targeted at 23 priority Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

It comes in the form of 100 per cent grants to Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the independent statutory bodies responsible for Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs) in areas like the Norfolk Broads and Somerset Levels. The cash will fund capital schemes like improvements to sluices to raise water levels.

English Nature's Senior Freshwater Officer, David Withrington, said, "This is a major step towards securing the conservation of some of our most precious wetland habitats. The improvements will benefit wading birds, such as snipe and redshank, as well as wintering ducks and geese."

The new funding follows a joint Defra and English Nature review of how WLMPs can contribute to the Government target of 95 per cent of SSSIs in favourable condition by 2010. Over the next five years, the Environment Agency is also funding the implementation of the 60 priority WLMPs for which it is the operating authority. English Nature will work with the IDBs and the Environment Agency to ensure that Plans for the SSSIs contain the actions necessary to deliver favourable condition.

FLPA

Snipe

New future for countryside agencies

The first draft of the new Bill to establish an integrated agency responsible for nature and the environment has been unveiled. The draft Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill, published last month, paves the way for the merger proposed by Lord Haskins in his 2003 Review of Rural Delivery.

The new agency will unite English Nature, agri-environment parts of Defra's Rural Development Service and the Landscape, Access and Recreation Division of the Countryside Agency.

Its role will be to: promote nature conservation and protect biodiversity; conserve and enhance the English landscape; provide and improve facilities to study, understand and enjoy nature; promote access to the countryside and open spaces; encourage outdoor recreation; and promote social and economic well-being through management of the natural environment.

English Nature's Chair, Sir Martin Doughty, said, "This consultation draft sets out an extremely important and very clear purpose for the new body which should deliver real improvements in the natural environment for the benefit of the country. English Nature's Council will consider the Bill in detail, to see whether its aspirations for the new agency are included, and will advise Government shortly."

Copies of the draft Bill are available on www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruraldelivery/bill/

Landmark ruling on bird haven

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Westhay moor, Somerset

A wildlife haven, part of England's biggest wetland, will remain a safe refuge for birds, following a landmark legal decision.

Environment Secretary, Margaret Beckett, backed English Nature's refusal of consent for commercial wildfowling on Westhay Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), in the first appeal heard under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Westhay Heath is part of the Somerset Levels and Moors and has been protected since July 1990. It is a quiet and peaceful place for wintering birds like gadwall, wigeon and tufted duck to feed and roost.

Wildfowling can be compatible with conservation if kept to sustainable levels. But English Nature refused consent for a commercial shoot at Westhay in July 2003 because it was felt fatalities and disturbance would be unacceptably high.

Editorial

Many of our most beautiful landscapes represent a rich and ancient association between man and nature. Whether you're in Dartmoor or Derbyshire, Somerset or Shropshire, evidence of this intimate relationship is everywhere. Iron-age hillforts, disused mine shafts, old stone quarries and scowles (see page 5) – all have their story to tell. These places, often undisturbed and undeveloped, can be havens of wildlife and beauty.

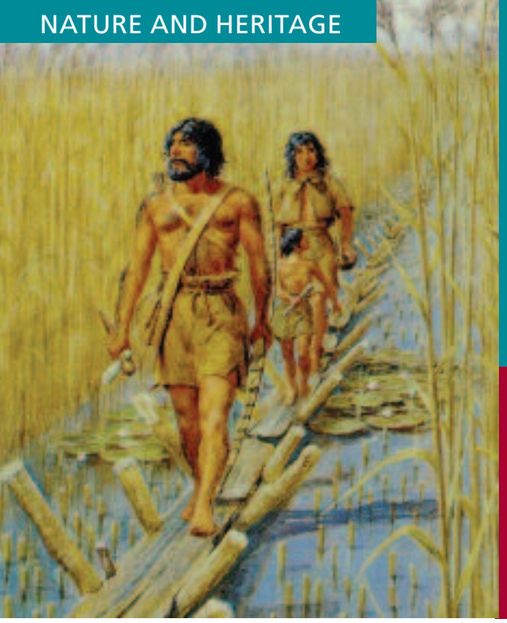
The presence of so many interests in one place has often been a problem in the past. Trying to find a management approach that takes account of archaeological, geological, landscape and wildlife interests isn't always easy. But new approaches to partnership working mean a more joined-up approach to looking after our heritage.

In this March issue of English Nature magazine we look at some great partnership working in Somerset (page 4), the Forest of Dean (page 5), Derbyshire (page 5), and inspiringly, at Down House in Kent (page 6 and 7), the former home of Charles Darwin.

These are just a few examples of successful joint working, and illustrate what will become normal practice in the countryside when the agencies merge in 2007 (see news adjacent).

This integrated approach underpins Environmental Stewardship, the new green scheme for farmers launched this month. Find out on pages 10 and 11 how good this will be for wildlife. And please come with us to Cumbria on pages 12 and 13 to meet the latest winners of the David Arnold-Forster hill farming awards. They tell us how they successfully combine wildlife, business and people on their beautiful farm.

Amanda Giles



E Mortlemans

A tapestry of treasures

England's heritage is a rich tapestry of ecological, geological and archaeological features – reflecting how humans and nature have developed side by side. Now all the experts are working together to preserve our national treasures.

Shapwick Heath, a monument to the history and culture of Neolithic man

Many important areas contain a mix of all these features. In fact, 7,519 Scheduled Monuments – 38 per cent of the country's protected structures – fall within Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and another 371 in National Nature Reserves (NNRs).

While this makes them even more interesting places to visit, those tasked with looking after the natural and built environment have to take the utmost care that the conservation of any single element is not carried out at the expense of another.

English Nature's Relationship Manager Rachel Thomas, said, "In the past, we have often worked in isolation towards our individual aims, with different outcomes in mind. For example, improving the diversity of plant cover on a site may make it more difficult to see an ancient monument, and protection of a historic building may affect wildlife living inside.

"But now an enhanced partnership approach means we are working more closely together to achieve a balanced approach towards protecting our environment as a whole."

Organisations have been brought together in a Joint Venture Programme and a number of joint projects are underway which have mutual conservation and archaeological objectives. This partnership approach to work will continue, even more positively, when the new integrated agency is set up (see news p 3).

Dr Vince Holyoak, English Heritage's Rural and Environmental policy officer added, "There is an old saying among archaeologists that not a square metre of the land has remained untouched by man, and most surviving habitats have been created by historic patterns of land use.

"As the strong link between Scheduled Monuments and SSSIs demonstrates, in areas where lower intensity land use has allowed historic landscape features to survive, these often have a biodiversity value as well. This new more holistic approach has arisen because we recognise that some problems are just too big for us to solve individually – but if we pool our expertise we can achieve workable, sustainable solutions."

Sweet success

On English Nature's Shapwick Heath NNR in Somerset, joint work with English Heritage and county archaeologists is protecting the oldest man-made routeway in Britain. Wet peat has preserved the famous Neolithic 'Sweet Track' – a 1.2-mile timber track built in 3,806 BC to link dry land in the flooded Somerset levels.

A pump and irrigation system has been created to keep the peat wet, preventing shrinking and splitting of the track below and protecting other artefacts from decay. It is hailed as the most successful scheme in the country for protecting a wetland archaeological site and has the dual benefit of conserving wetland flora and fauna.

Shapwick Heath NNR site manager Phil Holmes said, "Here we have an excellent opportunity to show the changing relationship between man and nature over many thousands of years and how one affects the other.

"On some parts of the reserve, you can catch a glimpse of what the landscape was like thousands of years ago and we have the perfect setting to explain current issues such as climate and sea level change using the evidence preserved in the peat below us."

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Dartmoor pony grazing on gorse

A vision for Dartmoor

Dartmoor National Park is one of the most important archaeological landscapes in England containing the country's largest concentration of Bronze Age remains in a 368 square-mile area. There are remains of over 5,000 Bronze Age round houses or huts and about a dozen Iron Age hillforts within the National Park.

Much of Dartmoor has been affected by overgrazing. Ecologists have been working to improve the quality of moorland by increasing the amount of gorse, heather and other dwarf shrubs and by allowing some natural expansion of woodland on the fringes. This had the potential for conflict as it was feared that increased vegetation in the wrong place could damage or obscure historic structures preventing visitors from seeing and enjoying them.

Now experts from English Nature, English Heritage, Dartmoor National Park, Defra's Rural Development Service and the Environment Agency have been working together on a joint vision for Dartmoor.

Moor Futures maps out what everyone agrees Dartmoor should look like in 25 years and aims to define the appropriate areas where changes can be made. The partners have identified a number of Prime Archaeological Landscapes (PALS) where archaeology is of international importance and preservation requires a landscape approach.

The agencies are expected to endorse the broad vision map for 2030 and agree more detailed visions for each PAL before exploring with land managers how this could be achieved. English Nature's Dartmoor Conservation Officer, Simon Bates, said, "Positive discussions have begun with farmers on livestock types and numbers needed to deliver the vision. The process has been as valuable as the vision itself."

Secrets of the Scowles

Mystery surrounds the origin of some intriguing features which are widespread across the woodlands of the Forest of Dean.

A series of undulating pits linked to underground systems follows seams of iron ore through the forest. These ancient surface mine workings are locally known as "scowles."

English Nature conservation officer Charlotte Pagendam is involved in the Forest of Dean Scowles Project, raising awareness of the ecological, geological and archaeological importance of these features.

She explained that there are different stories about the scowles and how they were formed. One theory is that they are completely man-made as a result of iron ore mining. Digging for ore at the surface created the scowles and as miners followed the seams underground they made deep mine systems beneath. Others believe they are created by a combination of human activity and a geological process of water flowing through limestone crevices, dissolving rock and causing underground collapse.

Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Dept.

Scowles near Bream, Lydney

Whatever the truth behind their development, they have an interesting story to tell about the area's history. Experts from English Nature, English Heritage, Gloucestershire County Council archaeologists, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, and Gloucestershire Geo-Conservation Trust are finding out more.

Scowles are generally thought of as Iron Age, but an archaeological survey has uncovered some evidence of iron ore mining in Roman and Medieval times. The search is on for artefacts to provide the evidence.

Charlotte said, "They have ecological interest because they have been abandoned and undisturbed for a long time so the flora is very different and typical of ancient woodland. In places, big pits on the surface provide a habitat for groves of very large yew trees with mosses and liverworts on bare exposed rock faces.

"Many scowles and mine systems beneath are used by bats. They are so extensive in the Forest of Dean that they provide an important habitat for Lesser and Greater Horseshoe bats."

English Nature is funding a further study of the plants and animals in the area and a leaflet highlighting the unique nature and importance of these features. It is due for publication this summer, and will be available from Helen Lancaster at English Nature's Gloucestershire Office.

J and I Palmer

The greenhouse, Darwin's laboratory for work on plant growth, movement and digestion

"It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us."

Darwin: The Origin of Species, 1859.

J and I Palmer

Following in a forefather's footsteps:

Darwin at Downe

A bid is being made to win World Heritage status for the former home of Charles Darwin – one of our most famous scientists.

After finding the first clue to evolution during his voyage on HMS Beagle, Darwin went to live at Downe, 16 miles from central London, in 1842 and stayed there until his death in 1882.

With his daily wildlife observations and experiments in the gardens, orchards and meadows around his home, he developed his theory of natural selection by focusing on patterns of natural life in local habitats. He then compared them with those further afield to reach global conclusions.

As he researched his renowned book *The Origin of Species,* nearly 150 years ago, he was among the first to develop the concept we now know as biodiversity and its importance for nature conservation and human survival.

His great-great-grandson Randal Keynes, a writer and conservationist, said, "When Darwin came to Downe, his mind was charged with ideas drawn from his observations around the world. In 40 years at Downe, he developed his theories by close study of natural life in one place, linking his observations here with facts from elsewhere, to form views which have increased our scientific understanding of the natural world and since led to the development of new sciences.

"It is satisfying to know that many of the plants, insects and animal species he observed are still here at Downe and that we can walk in his footsteps and share his insights."

English Nature is supporting the Darwin at Downe project, which aims to win World Heritage status for his home, Down House, and the historic Darwin Landscape. The site includes the house and grounds, now looked after by English Heritage and open to the public, and the surrounding countryside. It encompasses the High Elms & Downe Bank and the Keston & Hayes Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

The bid, led by London Borough of Bromley, is also supported by English Heritage, the Natural History Museum, the Mayor of London, the Charles Darwin Trust and the Kent and London Wildlife Trusts. It will be submitted to UNESCO by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport next year, for possible approval in 2007, in time for the worldwide commemoration of Darwin's bicentenary in 2009 and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of Species.*

Down House, Darwin's home

Peter Massini, English Nature's Regional Policy Officer for the London area said, "The nearby, familiar landscape of south-east London's urban fringe is a far cry from the mysterious Galapagos Islands. But Darwin studied them both, and it was his meticulous and prolonged examination of wildlife around Downe that informed his thinking on evolution and origin of species.

"The countryside around Downe still abounds with wildlife – plants and animals descended from the very creatures Darwin observed. We hope to encourage people to follow in his footsteps, to enjoy and appreciate the natural world and, perhaps, to be inspired to contemplate the many still-unanswered questions the evolutionary process offers."

English Nature is chairing a Biodiversity Working Group to involve people in continuing Darwin's work and studies. There will be walks, talks and events to boost appreciation of the proposed World Heritage Site and its wildlife.

In a "Biodiversity Blitz", expert naturalists will survey the area, then local amateur naturalists, schools and colleges will join in a monitoring project. The group will draw up a united vision to align management plans for land in the area, owned by Bromley Council, Kent Wildlife Trust, the Woodland Trust and local farmers.

Maurice Strong, Chair of the UN Rio Earth Summit in 1992, strongly supports the World Heritage bid. He said, "I particularly welcome the emphasis on Darwin's historic role in explaining the central significance of biodiversity. It is wonderful to hear that the World Heritage Site will include the places where Darwin first studied biodiversity. Darwin's scientific work was one of the supreme achievements of the human mind, and has been an inspiration to scientists in all countries ever since."

Find out more on www.darwinatdowne.co.uk

Mine Capping

David Webb

Beehive shaft cover

A long history of lead mining has been a major influence on the landscape of Derbyshire's Peak District where mine shafts and horizontal "adits" now contain nuggets of archaeology and nature conservation treasures.

Many lead rakes, surface mining remains including hollows and hillocks, which form a network across the carboniferous limestone, are protected as SSSIs for their biological value or as Scheduled Monuments for their archaeological interest.

Lead rakes often support valuable plant communities and shafts can provide roost sites for bats, as well as having archaeological and recreational value. Some lead rakes are internationally important, because of metalophyte (metal tolerant) plants. The distribution of these plants, such as spring sandwort, *Minuartia verna* (locally nicknamed leadwort), alpine pennycress, *Thlaspi alpestre,* moonwort, *Botrychium lunaria* and mountain pansy, *Viola lutea*, follows the underground path of the lead rakes.

But mine shafts are often found on agricultural land and near public areas, so for safety reasons, have to be "capped" or covered over, by landowners and other organisations. This needs to be done sensitively to avoid damaging the various interests.

Now English Nature, Derbyshire Caving Association, English Heritage, the Peak District National Park and Derbyshire County Council have got together to draw up new guidelines on how to identify the archaeological, recreational, wildlife and landscape value of shafts. They will outline the latest mine-capping techniques allowing all these factors to be taken into account – including special designs to give access to bats or even people.

Precious stone

English Nature and English Heritage are working together on a Strategic Stone Study looking at ways of integrating nature conservation and building conservation needs.

Natural building and roofing stones are needed to conserve historic buildings and structures. These are increasingly difficult to supply, due to a lack of information on likely demand and on potential sources and because of a range of restrictions on opening or re-opening quarries, often in areas protected by environmental designations.

The study, initially focused on Shropshire and Warwickshire, will examine stones used in local buildings, where they were quarried in the past and where they might be obtained in future. It aims to produce guidance for decision-makers on stone sources and how sites relate to conservation designations.

It will provide guidance on the international, national, and local importance of different building and roofing stones and, for the pilot areas, will plot on a map the potential sources and the conservation designations to be taken into account when planning for their extraction.

FOCUS ON... North Meadow

One of the most uplifting sights of early Spring is a meadow full of colourful flowers. In north Wiltshire, near the town of Cricklade, you can see one of our rarest and most beautiful flowers – at North Meadow National Nature Reserve.

Stephen Davis/English Nature

North Meadow and the town of Cricklade

The reserve is the home of our largest population of snake's head fritillary containing nearly 80 per cent of the total British population of this lovely plant. The fritillary, with its purple or white bell-shaped flowers, is confined to meadowland and has lost much of its habitat over the last 30 years.

On a trip to North Meadow you will find yourself surrounded by traditional middle English countryside. With its open meadows, pollarded willows and meandering rivers, the 44-hectare site is one of the finest examples of a lowland hay meadow left in Europe.

It is one of English Nature's Spotlight NNRs, which means it is one of the best wildlife sites you can visit. (see opposite) It was voted one of Wiltshire's favourite heritage sites in a recent public poll.

Site Manager Rob Wolstenholme said, "This ancient hay meadow attracts between 5,000 and 6,000 visitors every year. The people who come to North Meadow enjoy an amazing variety of wildflowers, birds, dragonflies, and butterflies. If you visit us in April, you can see Britain's largest display of snake's head fritillaries with around 500,000 plants flowering every year."

Watch out for wildlife

At this time of year there should also be bright yellow clusters of marsh marigold contrasting with the pink of cuckooflower – and, if you look closely, you will see the tiny adder's tongue fern and the first of the early marsh orchids.

The meadow and boundary hedges are full of birds throughout the year. In spring and summer, skylarks nest in the grass while great tits, blue tits, chaffinches, linnets and tree creepers prefer the hedges and tree hollows. Reed buntings and sedge warblers nest and feed along the banks of the Rivers Thames and Churn, with swallows, sand martins and swifts feeding over the meadow in summer. Wading birds, such as snipe and sandpipers visit the meadow during the winter months.

Fourteen species of dragonfly have been recorded, mainly at the meadow edge and common frogs breed in the ditches bordering the meadow. In summer, the hay meadow flowers attract a variety of insects, such as the vibrant blue damselflies, brightly-coloured burnet moths and various beetles.

North Meadow is one of the best-known examples in Britain of an ancient meadow and it has an interesting history. It has been managed for hundreds of years by the people of Cricklade, with common grazing rights conferred by the 1814 Enclosure Act. English Nature has owned most of the land since the early 1970s.

It is traditionally managed as "lammas land" which means it is used for common grazing between August 12 and February 12 each year and cut for hay no earlier than July 1 with the crop sold to local farmers. This maintains a rich grassland flora. To ensure the tradition continues, English Nature works closely with residents and the local "Court Leet," which once took the role of the magistrates, police and local authorities, and still exists to safeguard the grazing rights of the people of Cricklade.

Look out for ancient carved stones at various points across the meadow marking the boundaries of different hay lots.

During the winter the rivers often flood the meadow – but this is actually good for the site. Flooding is vital to the growth of many plants and helps to maintain the wide variety of species you will see when you visit North Meadow NNR.

On April 16, there will be some guided walks around the meadow to find out more about the flora and fauna and the interesting history of the reserve.

For details, contact Rob Wolstenholme on 01380 737009 or email robert.wolstenholme@english-nature.org.uk

Stephen Davis/English Nature

Snake's head fritillaries

The Seasons of North Meadow: Put us in the picture

North Meadow is running an exciting spring competition with visitors invited to capture its unique beauty.

English Nature is offering prizes for the best artistic interpretation of the reserve's changing character through the seasons, in a photograph, painting or other art form. Prizes include £150 worth of photography vouchers, two digital cameras, a book on England's National Nature Reserves and a guided tour of Pewsey Downs NNR in North Wiltshire.

A selection of the best photos and artwork will be displayed at a public venue in Cricklade in July. The winning entries will be used on a postcard and on English Nature's website. The closing date is 31 May 2005.

If you'd like to enter, or find out more contact Jane Clarke, at English Nature, Prince Maurice Court, Hambleton Avenue, Devizes, SN10 2RT, phone: 01380 726344 or email jane.clarke@english-nature.org.uk

Further information can be found on www.english-nature.org.uk

Where to walk

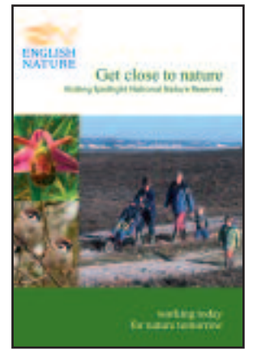
There are a number of enjoyable walks around the reserve, offering a choice of times and distances:

- The River Walk – the longest route, a one and a half hour ramble passing the rivers Thames and Churn taking in the whole of the meadow.
- The Reedbed Walk – takes in the best fritillary areas. You need about 25 minutes to explore the meadow, riverbank and ditches.
- The Willow Walk – the shortest route taking about 20 minutes. Stroll across the meadow, past pollarded willows and hedgerows.

How to get there

- North Meadow NNR is in northern Wiltshire at the western end of the Thames Valley. The meadow lies northwest of Cricklade, between the River Churn to the north and the River Thames to the south.
- By road: Take the Cricklade exit from the A419, head into the town centre turning right along the high street which leads directly to the reserve.
- There are bus links and car parking in the town.
- The reserve is about 20 minutes walk north west of Cricklade town centre and can be reached by public footpaths.
- There is roadside parking within 300 metres and a disabled access gate at the site.

Stephen Davis/English Nature



In the spotlight

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are the jewels of England's wildlife and geological treasures – special places that can offer people unrivalled opportunities to get close to nature. They stimulate the mind, body and spirit. Some sites have been picked out as Spotlight NNRs because they are the best places to see wildlife and geology without accidentally disturbing or damaging the very things you have come to enjoy. Most Spotlight NNRs have self-guided nature trails, information panels and leaflets, and viewing areas to help you to see and learn about the site. More and more offer access for less able people.

We are publishing a new English Nature booklet, *Get Close to Nature* focusing on Spotlight NNRs. It is packed with information about the reserves, showing how to find them and all the exciting things to see and do there.

Rachel Lockwood, English Nature's Interpretation and Events Manager, says, "Visiting NNRs isn't just about spotting colourful birds and butterflies, fascinating plants or beautiful scenery. They are tranquil havens where you can unwind and rediscover our natural world. Nature is for everyone, so please come and enjoy it!"

The booklet is available from enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

New green payments for our countryside:

Putting nature on the map

Paul Glendell/English Nature

Common poppies on a farm at West Pentire, Cornwall

Defra's agri-environment scheme launched this month gives all farmers in England the chance to get paid to look after the wildlife, landscapes and natural resources on their land.

Environmental Stewardship combines two different approaches to increasing wildlife in the countryside.

The Entry Level is widely available and will focus on the decline in environmental quality across the whole of the farmed landscape. It aims to reverse the decline in once common farmland birds, for example, by encouraging relatively simple management changes, such as the timing of hedge cutting and the sensitive management of field margins. (see column right) We hope that most farmers will join Entry Level Stewardship, so these results will be seen across wide areas of the countryside.

Higher level Stewardship will focus on habitats which require more detailed and demanding management such as heathland or limestone grassland, some of which will be Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Christine Reid, English Nature's agri-environment policy officer explained that the new scheme will help tackle some of the biggest causes of 'unfavourable' condition on SSSIs, such as overgrazing of moorland, drainage of wetland, and scrub invasion of heathland. She hopes it will encourage good practice, such as traditional hay meadow management, and appropriate grazing of heathland, moor and down.

She said, "The good thing is that it is a whole farm scheme, not just concentrating on areas with special features – so all farmers will be eligible. Wildlife is important on all farmland. We need to stop flowers like poppies and corn marigolds, and birds like the skylark and corn bunting, from disappearing.

"The new scheme is more focused on end-results rather than asking farmers to simply follow instructions. Farmers will be clear about what they are aiming to achieve, and hopefully keen to sign up. We hope they will enjoy farming for wildlife and the landscape as part of their commercial enterprise."

For more information on stewardship, please see http://www.defra.gov.uk /erdp/schemes/es/default.htm

Nature on the map

English Nature's web-based mapping tool will help advisers and applicants get the most from the new scheme by showing them how important their local area is for wildlife.

This will ensure they select scheme options, from both the Entry Level and Higher Level menus, that match the needs of local wildlife. The maps illustrate hotspots for farmland birds, priority areas for Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, rivers at risk from diffuse agricultural pollution, and the condition and management needs of Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Visit the site today at http://www.natureonthemap.org.uk/

Farmland Birds

Environmental Stewardship is the main tool for delivering the Government's Public Service Agreement (PSA) target on farmland birds. This seeks to reverse the decline in populations by 2020.

Both levels will be good for farmland birds. Entry Level Stewardship will be available almost everywhere. It will involve simple, low cost but effective options that will maintain existing features such as hedgerows, ditches and in-field trees in good condition, as well as creating new features for birds such as buffer strips, wild bird seed mixtures and skylark plots. This scheme will be best for birds that are still widespread such as skylarks, yellowhammers, linnets and reed buntings.

Higher Level Stewardship will help specific bird species in defined areas. It will include more costly options such as fallow plots for ground-nesting birds; low-input spring crops with lower levels of fertilisers and pesticides to provide nesting sites and weedy overwinter stubbles; enhanced field margin and wild bird cover options; and options to manage wet grassland and scrub.

This will benefit scarcer and less widespread species such as corn buntings, tree sparrows, turtle doves and breeding waders like the lapwing.

Making the most of ancient trees

For many farmers, a mature tree in the middle of a field, however beautiful, can sometimes present an awkward obstruction.

But these trees can be hundreds of years old and an important part of our national heritage. Britain has one of the most significant ancient tree populations in Northern Europe.

The Woodland Trust and the Ancient Tree Forum have launched a free guide, *Ancient Tree Guides No.1: Trees and Farming,* with funding from a partnership including English Nature. It shows farmers how best to care for these living monuments and how grants from the Environmental Stewardship scheme can help.

For example, there are payments for creating buffer strips around trees in arable fields, to prevent them from being damaged by ploughing and trampling. There are also payments for buffer strips that protect woodland from spraying. Higher Level Stewardship (see opposite) includes options for woodland and parkland management, and caring for traditional orchards.

Ted Green of the Ancient Tree Forum says, "An ancient oak tree can be up to a thousand years old. In its lifetime it will have seen the Norman invasion of 1066, provided the wood to make ships to defeat the Spanish Armada and resisted the pressures and pollution of the Industrial Revolution."

One of the oldest trees in England is the Major Oak, a pedunculate oak, *Quercus robur*, in the Sherwood Forest NNR. The tree is about 800 years old with a girth of 10 metres, and legend has it that Robin Hood hid inside it to escape from his enemies. It is protected by a fence to stop visitors from trampling the soil around it and damaging its roots.

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Major Oak in Sherwood Forest NNR

"We know that for many farmers, an ancient tree in a field or hedgerow is part of the landscape they work around," added Ted. "This leaflet helps farmers find out how to look after them better and how the new grants can help."

The leaflet also has funding and support from English Heritage, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, the National Trust and the Forestry Commission.

To get a copy, write to Woodland Trust, Dysart Rd, Grantham, Lincs, NG31 6SW or visit http://www.woodland-trust .org.uk/ancient-tree-forum /atfnews/news04/guides.htm

Farming with a love for the land

English Nature sponsors an annual hill farming award in honour of David Arnold-Forster, our previous Chief Executive and Chair of the Government's Hill Farming Task Force up to his death in 2002. The latest winners are Sam and Candida Hodgson of Glencoyne Farm.

Friends of the Lake District

Schoolchildren learn about wildlife at Glencoyne Farm

Joshua Hodgson, aged 8

Candida and Sam Hodgson with their Whitefaced Woodland Sheep

David Arnold-Forster OBE TD

David grew up in the Yorkshire Dales where he developed his keen interest in nature conservation and environmental management and earned the affectionate nickname "the human dynamo."

The David Arnold Forster Trust was set up following his untimely death during his second year as Chief Executive. It is a limited company with charitable status. The objectives are:

- To honour the life and work of David Arnold-Forster in the field of nature conservation.
- To promote sustainable upland hill farming and agriculture for the public benefit.
- To advance education of the public in upland hill farming and agriculture.

David's widow, Anita, presented the winners with a trophy, certificate and a cheque at their farm.

Anyone lucky enough to visit Glencoyne Farm on the banks of Lake Ullswater will find a countryside rich in wildlife.

You can often catch a glimpse of a red deer or, if you're lucky, a red squirrel. It may be the song of the skylark and willow warbler that is so evocative – or the purple of a landscape covered in heather and wild geraniums such as the appealing wood cranesbill.
One thing is certain; this healthy environment is mainly down to the efforts of tenant farmers Sam and Candida Hodgson, who have farmed here for nine years.

The couple have won the second annual David Arnold-Forster Trust Hill Farming Award in recognition of the success with which they balance their nature conservation ideals with business aims.

John Varley, Chair of the Trust and a close personal friend of David's said, "Sam and Candida have given us a great example of a farm which balances the needs of the environment with the requirement to be economically sustainable. Their actions accord with what David knew was needed to turn the industry around."

Sam and Candida's 1225-hectare beef and sheep farm near Glenridding in the Lake District has high conservation value. It includes three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and two Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

The land, set against the dramatic backdrop of Glencoyne Dale, covers high fell down to the lake shore with flat valley floor meadows in front of the farmstead. It provides perfect habitat for a wide diversity of plants and animals. Wildlife typical of woodland, heathland grassland, flushes and mires are all found on the farm.

Sam said, "We believe good quality farming doesn't need to be at the expense of the environment. For many years, farmers have been encouraged to increase production, but things are changing. We are trying to show there is an alternative, which maintains traditional farming and enhances the landscape."

The couple took over the National Trust farm in 1996 and have gradually halved their 2100-strong sheep flock to reduce grazing pressure on valuable habitats. They have entered into a Sheep Wildlife Enhancement Scheme (SWES) with English Nature to graze the high fell between spring and autumn only, to avoid damaging heather shoots. Fewer sheep within the Helvellyn and Fairfield SSSI should bring the site into favourable condition in the next few years.

"If nature is in balance everything is health and happy."

Candida said, "We live in a stunning landscape and feel we have responsibility to care for it. If nature is in balance, everything is healthy and happy, including our sheep, which are our main interest. We can use an area like this, which has many visitors, to show people that farming can be carried out in a sensitive way. It's nice when they notice the difference, even if it's just a well-maintained wall or more wild flowers."

They have closed off 67 hectares under a Forestry Commission LEAP (Livestock Exclusion Annual Payment) agreement, excluding livestock to allow natural regeneration of trees, improving grassland biodiversity.

Candida said, "Amid the tussock grasses, which were originally quite bare, you can now see mice and voles jumping right in front of your feet. We see foxes and badgers and we have spotted a number of owls. The whole food chain is in a healthier state."

On one small part of Glencoyne Park, an area of grazed park and woodland, more than 400 plant species have been recorded and it is rich in bird species. The Hodgsons have submitted this area for the Management Habitat section of the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme. They have also used higher-level elements to preserve important semi-natural meadowland habitats and favour low-input farming with little fertiliser use and no sprays.

"We cut the grass after the flowers have seeded and we are rewarded with a beautiful bank of flowers, and lovely smells. The orchids have increased and there is a bed of Grass of Parnassus on the Fell," said Candida.

"In spring, the birdsong is delightful. We have seen peregrines and buzzards and an oystercatcher comes into the lambing fields. Up on the fells there are ring ouzels and wheatears."

Sam, from a prominent local farming family, is well respected as a stockman and farmer and known for his single suckler Limousin cows and Swaledale sheep. Candida is interested in preserving rare breeds and has built up a flock of 45 Whitefaced Woodland sheep.

The couple recently hosted an education day supporting a *Flora of the Fells* publication by the local Friends of the Lakes. A hundred schoolchildren visited the farm with a team of artists who took them out looking for buds and flowers. Candida recalls, "The artists then went back into the schools and worked with the children to produce artwork which was displayed in a really professional exhibition in the village hall. We hope to do something similar again, it was such great fun."

They also care for historic landscape features and have restored 2000 metres of wall, using the ESA scheme. The farm includes Listed Grade II historic buildings and a Scheduled Monument. Sam said, "We have an Iron Age Settlement, unearthed by Glasgow University. Tests revealed it is one of the oldest settlements in The Lakes."

So what is next for Glencoyne Farm? "Recent horrendous storms brought down quite a lot of trees, so we are now thinking of how we can get some young replacements in there," said Candida. "Archaeologists told us the area has been a grazing woodland for 800 years – so it is quite nice to continue something that has been done for so long before us."

More on Green Payments, p10.

Gardening with wildlife in mind

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Broad-bodied chaser dragonfly
Libellula depressa

English Nature has just published its latest leaflet about gardening for wildlife. *Garden ponds and wetlands: havens for wildlife* is about designing, constructing and looking after a wildlife pond. STEVE BERRY offers some personal reflections on wildlife in ponds.

Ponds were formerly a common sight in lowland farmland. Revisiting the area where I grew up 40 years ago, it seemed every pond I remembered had gone, together with the cattle they had served. Where there were once grass snakes and frogs, there were now arable crops.

Everywhere, ponds went and with them, their dependent wildlife. But things are improving, thanks to more than a million garden ponds, contributing to nature conservation.

Ponds for wildlife offer quick rewards. My first one was rapidly colonised by whirligig beetles, then pondskaters. Bird visitors included unlikely species for a city centre, like redpoll and grey wagtail, as well as regulars like starlings and blackbirds.

My current pond has drawn in eight species of dragonflies and damselflies, and then, to my great joy, a grass snake in 2002 – and each year since.

There's room for a pond in every garden. If you have one already, why not make another? If you haven't, now's the time. If you have small children and are wary of open water, try a bog or marsh. A miniature wetland can be a delight to the eye and of huge value to wildlife.

The leaflets are free, from the Enquiry Service. Call 01733 455101 or e-mail enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

English Nature's CD, *Gardening with wildlife in mind,* costs £9.99 (add £1.50 for p & p).

Contact John Stockdale, The Plant Press, Lewes (01273 476151) or e-mail john@plantpress.com

Things to do in March and April

- Avoid invasive aquatic species like parrot's feather, fairy fern and New Zealand pygyweed. These can cover your pond and choke out other life. Never dump plants in the wild – they can cause massive harm to native wildlife.
- Give your pet a regular brushing and put the fur in the garden – it makes an ideal lining for birds' nests!
- Two useful annuals are Californian poppy and poached egg plant. Both attract hoverflies, which help keep down aphids.

Beetle Drive

Gardeners are invited to join an innovative scheme to help save one of Britain's most endangered insects.

Next month, the People's Trust for Endangered Species will be asking you to Bury Buckets 4 Beetles to provide a habitat for stag beetles – our largest terrestrial beetles, so-called because of the male's huge jaws which resemble a stag's antlers.

Alice Henchley, Public Relations Officer for the conservation charity said, "The stag beetle, one of our most impressive insects is a charismatic creature, targeted by the government for special help. It breeds in decaying and dead wood and does not attack garden furniture or fencing as some believe.

"The insects are completely harmless but are losing the environment in which they need to breed and develop. Numbers have plummeted throughout much of Europe so those in the UK are especially important."

All you have to do to give the insects a home is to create breeding grounds by burying buckets drilled with holes and filled with wood chipping in a garden or other green space. Female stag beetles will, hopefully, lay eggs in the buckets and larvae will develop for four years before emerging to breed.

Deborah Harvey, PTES

Male stag beetle

The project will support monitoring for the Biodiversity Action Plan drawn up to conserve the species. So, participants will be asked to carefully empty out their buckets, sift through the contents and report on the beetle larvae they find in the second year and every year after that.

Full instructions and registration forms can be found on www.ptes.org or by phoning 020 7498 4533.

Now is the time for… spring flowers

Jonathan Cox

An eagerly awaited sign that spring has arrived is the flowering of wild plants. They signal a gradual increase in light and warmth after the cold and dark of winter. Here are four characteristic spring flowers to look out for.

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Jonathan Cox

1. Lesser Celandine
Ranunculus ficaria

Lesser celandine is one of the earliest flowering plants in England. Its bright yellow star-like flowers brighten woods, hedgerows, stream sides, road verges and pastures, particularly on seasonally wet or flooded soils. It is a member of the buttercup family, with dark green heart-shaped leaves and can spread via small root tubers and bulbils which break off and form new plants. An old local name for the plant is Spring Messenger.

2. Bluebell
Hyacinthoides non-scripta

The broad-leaved woods of England are particularly important for the much-loved bluebell, which is native only to countries fringing the Atlantic. Bluebells characterise acidic, sandy loams but also grow on heavier and calcareous soils. They flower most freely in light shade and occur in woodland, in hedgerows, on shady banks, beneath bracken, in grassland and on cliffs.

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Peter Wakely/English Nature

3. Wood Anemone
Anemone nemorosa

The graceful wood anemone occurs in woodlands throughout most of England, coming into leaf and flowering early before the growth of the tree canopy has reduced light levels. It is most frequent in woodland where the vigour of more competitive species is reduced by acid or waterlogged soils or by regular coppicing. Due to its very slow rate of spread it is an indicator of the presence of ancient woodland.

4. Primrose *Primula vulgaris*

Primrose is the prima rosa, first rose or first flower of the year. For generations it has been a token of spring. Found throughout England in woodland, hedgerows, moist grassland and coastal slopes, primroses prefer sites which are shaded from hot sun, but need regular bursts of light to flower and set seed. They spread readily when paths are opened up in woodland. Primroses were the politician Disraeli's favourite flower, and on Primrose day, 19 April, they are placed on his statue in front of Westminster Abbey.

Letters

Dear Ms Giles

As you highlighted in your November issue, the Heritage Lottery Fund has made a major contribution towards funding nature conservation and environmental programmes. At a time when alternative funding for practical nature conservation has been in desperately short supply, the HLF has become a lifeline source of finance for voluntary conservation bodies.

But the financial weakness of conservation organisations has led them to undertake work that they can get funds for, rather than the work that is most important for conserving wildlife. When the two are the same it is a happy and fruitful coincidence: but when they are not, it is the providers of funds that set the conservation agenda.

HLF feels that it is necessary for projects they fund to highlight community benefits. This is entirely appropriate in principle, but in reality this too often is simplistically translated into promotion of recreational access and the provision of interpretation, ignoring wider concepts of 'public goods'.

A perception has developed that recreational access, countryside interpretation and conserving wildlife are the same thing. In a well-managed and properly staffed nature reserve it is possible to successfully integrate these legitimate but completely separate functions. But promoting access and putting up an information board in a sensitive wildlife site without the manpower to manage potentially damaging impacts is a recipe for disaster.

The success of an important conservation site ought to be judged by the abundance of its wildlife, not by the number of general visitors, most of whom could experience at least as much pleasure and enjoyment in the less fragile wider countryside.

Yours sincerely, Roy A. Harris MBE

Errata:
Thank-you to those readers who pointed out a number of errors in the January edition.
On page 11 the "Shapwick Giant Project," we described Shapwick Heath NNR as being in Gloucestershire, when it is, of course, in Somerset. On page 13 "Good news for old orchards," the caption was transposed to read "tree sparrow" when our picture showed the spotted flycatcher, the other bird mentioned in the article.
Our aim is to maintain high standards of accuracy and we hope these mistakes did not spoil your enjoyment of the articles concerned.

Grant aid for quarry sites

A new grant scheme launched jointly by English Nature and the Countryside Agency will make available more than £9 million to reduce the effects of aggregate extraction on local communities and the environment.

In its first three years, English Nature's Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF) has achieved amazing results, supporting over 190 applications and awarding a total of £10.8 million in grants.

Now, in the run-up to an integrated agency, applications are invited for the new ALSF Partnership Grant Scheme, which will have an allocation of £5.7 million in 2005/2006 with another £4 million for 2006/2007.

Neil Clark, English Nature's ALSF Project Manager, said, "The purpose of our ALSF grant scheme is to provide benefits for the environment and local people affected by extraction. We have supported a wide variety of excellent projects, which are delivering exactly that.

"The scheme has received considerable interest over the past three years and we have worked with a range of partners from minerals operators to small community groups, to make this a great success."

Success stories

Cleeve Wood, Bristol: Awarded £138,750

This 55.6-hectare wood shows clear evidence of aggregate quarrying and is of high ecological, recreational and historic value. The wood, which is popular with walkers, takes in the lower half of Goblin Combe Valley and contains an Iron Age hill fort which is designated a Scheduled Monument. The settlement is the only positively identified Iron Age site in England that has never been excavated.

Next to the wood is Goblin Combe, an impressive limestone gorge which was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in November 1999 to protect several rare and interesting plant species such as stinking hellebore, *Helleborus foetidus* and spiked speedwell *Veronica spicata*.

The Goblin Combe Environment Centre has used the woodlands and surrounding geological features to provide the community with a range of courses and improved access.

A joint ALSF award of £46,250 each from English Nature, the Countryside Agency and English Heritage allowed North Somerset Council to buy the site from private owners and open up the wood to the public.

Holme Park Quarry, Cumbria: Awarded £119,770.

Holme Park has been an active limestone aggregate quarry for over 50 years and is currently worked by Aggregate Industries UK Ltd. Historically, quarrying has increased noise levels, dust and traffic, significantly affecting the surrounding villages, geology and wildlife. So, local residents formed a liaison committee with representatives from English Nature, the County Council, Parish Councils and Aggregate Industries.

Using the grant money, the committee appointed a project officer to manage the area and to look at ways of reducing the impact of extraction.

They had dry-stone walls repaired to allow stock to graze the land, which will eventually restore a diverse mix of flora to the site. Improved access, interpretation boards and leaflets have opened up the area for quiet enjoyment and educational purposes. Residents can learn about the wildlife and geology and how human intervention has influenced the local landscape.

Jane Hopwood, Chair of the Quarry Liaison committee said, "This money from English Nature's ALSF grant scheme has brought many benefits for wildlife and the people of Holme and Burton and we are very grateful for the support."

Find out more on www.english-nature.org.uk

FACTFILE:

Not all rock types are quarried for use as aggregate and only some are subject to the aggregates levy.

Only projects linked to aggregates that have paid the levy, (or would have paid it in the case of disused quarries) are considered for ALSF funding.

Examples of acceptable aggregates are:

- sand & gravel
- crushed rock, such as limestone, sandstone, granite, diorite, dolerite and basalt

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Limestone pavement in Holme Park Quarry