

# ENGLISH NATURE Magazine

Issue 83

January 2006



## Wildlife everywhere

Finding hidden treasures in unexpected places

### Fledgling birders

Children take red kites  
under their wings

### Flight path

Some perfect places  
for bird watching

### Natural remedy

Why the great outdoors  
is good for our health



## Natural England

Major changes are currently taking place within Government about the way England's landscapes and nature are managed, protected, funded and enjoyed in the future.

A new independent body – Natural England – to be created in October 2006, is bringing together the current roles of English Nature, the Landscape, Access and Recreation division of the Countryside Agency and the environment activities of the Rural Development Service.



Cover picture by Paul Keene



Red kites dive into gardens in Stokenchurch in the Chilterns to grab meat put out for them by residents.

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## Facelift gets cliffs buzzing



English Nature

The cliff-face at Pegwell Bay

The completion of a three-year facelift has brought new life to the cliffs of Pegwell Bay – one of England's most important geological sites.

The cliff-face, part of the Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes Site of Special Scientific

Interest (SSSI), in east Kent, has been cleared of vegetation to expose the Thanet Sands and their intersection with the underlying chalk laid down 55 million years ago. The restoration was carried out under English Nature's *Face Lift* programme which restores geological features in SSSIs.



Mike Edwards

A rare solitary wasp emerges

The project has had spin-off benefits for wildlife. Susannah Peckham, of English Nature's Kent Team, said, "The work has brought parts of Pegwell Bay literally buzzing into life. Populations of solitary wasps and bees, many of which are rare or nationally scarce, are making the most of the ideal nesting conditions on the sandy cliff-face."

Pegwell is now one of the country's most important sites for the rare solitary wasp *Cerceris quadricincta* which nests in burrows in the soft material of the cliff-face.

The work has opened up the site to be enjoyed by hundreds of local people, visitors, geologists and students, who will be able to view the newly exposed sediments, accessible for the first time in 40 years.

## Stack the odds for lottery fund winners

The Heritage Lottery Fund, (HLF), has given cash support to hundreds of conservation projects over the past 11 years and is trying to find out how people think the money should be spent in future.

The fund has paid out £3.3 billion of lottery money to 18,000 initiatives which preserve our national heritage. Over £500 million of this has gone to projects which directly benefit the UK's landscapes, nature reserves and wildlife.

The Chair of HLF, Liz Forgan, said, "Not everyone knows about

our role in supporting projects to enhance the natural environment, but, in fact, we have funded a range of initiatives from basking shark surveys to restoring heathlands in Cornwall. As competition for the grants is increasing dramatically, we are really keen to hear people's views on what sort of projects are most important to them."

The consultation has been called *Our Heritage, Our Future, Your Say*. To contribute, visit <http://www.hlf.org.uk/future> before 28 February 2006.



## Natural England Chair is chosen



**Sir Martin Doughty**, Chair of English Nature since May 2001, has become Chair Designate of Natural England, the new statutory body which will be

responsible for conserving, enhancing and managing the natural environment from October.

The new body will unite English Nature, the Countryside Agency's Landscape, Access and Recreation division and part of Defra's Rural Development Service. Sir Martin was a board member of the Countryside Agency from 1999 to March 2005. He developed his expertise and interest in nature conservation, landscape and access work as a member of the Peak District National Park Authority for 15 years including nine as its Chair. He was also Chair of the Association of National Park Authorities from 1997 to 2001.

He said, "I am delighted to accept the challenge of helping to create and lead the new organisation. Natural England will be a robust and influential advocate for the natural environment with the commitment and strength of purpose to make a real difference to people's lives."

Dr Mike Moser, previously Deputy Chair of English Nature, has taken up the role of Acting Chair to carry English Nature's work through to the creation of Natural England. Dr Moser is a freelance international environmental consultant, specialising in wetlands and nature conservation. He has been Deputy Chair of English Nature since May 2004. Two other



Dr Mike Moser

English Nature Council members, Professor Ed Gallagher and Professor David MacDonald, were reappointed until 30 September 2006.

## Royal assent for Jubilee park

The Princess Royal, Princess Anne, officially opened a £580,000 restoration project in November, which turned a derelict scrub wasteland into a landscaped park and wildlife haven.

deciduous woodland. A drainage culvert has been converted into a meandering stream and wheelchair-friendly trails are raised to let people visit the meadows and view the rare flood plain habitat.

Jubilee Meadows, in Willington, County Durham, was transformed over three years as part of English Nature's Minerals Valley project, an ongoing environmental regeneration

scheme. The site, which had become a no-go area for local people, is now a community attraction with herb-rich meadows and broad-leaved



Princess Anne unveils a plaque

The Princess Royal was given a guided tour of the park before meeting local schoolchildren and the project partners. The work was done by Willington Community Partnership supported by

English Nature, the Heritage Lottery Fund and environmental regeneration charity Groundwork.

### Going underground

Meet some surprising railway residents 6 – 7



### NNR Focus

Birdwatching bonanza at Stodmarsh NNR 12



### Healthy options

The way forward on outdoor recreation 14 – 15



### Dudley volcano

A natural hotspot for fitness walks 16 – 17



## Editorial

It's reassuring to know that nature isn't just about special sites and precious reserves. It's everywhere. Most committed conservationists owe their passion, not to specific species in particular places, but to an everyday awareness of the wildlife around them. It could be as simple as the sound of a summer skylark or seeing Bewick's swans flying in to their open-water roosting places on a frosty January twilight – these are the sights and sounds that inspire us.

Exciting discoveries can be made in the most uncommon, as well as common places. On pages 6 and 7 we find out about wildlife treasures on the tube, on pages 8 and 9 we look at how green golf courses are getting, and on pages 10 and 11 we hear about some of the most extraordinary residents living along our canals and waterways.

In typical New Year style, we look at initiatives encouraging us to get out, active and healthy on pages 14 to 17, and on page 20 we visit a Chichester hospital where bringing nature into the wards helps patient healing and recovery.

Happy New Year!

Amanda Giles





# Updates

Keeping you in the picture



Emma Mortimer/English Nature

Libby Bettney, Louisa Robinson and Alice Burke tackle the hawthorn scrub

## Baby boom

The 2005 breeding season at Donna Nook National Nature Reserve saw the birth of 994 grey seal pups, echoing last year's figure of 998. The first new arrival was on 30 October, then more and more youngsters were born all along the 10km east coast beach throughout November and December.

A total of 45,000 visitors went along to welcome the new babies to the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust reserve, hailed as the best place in the country to watch this wildlife spectacle as it has

one of the largest, most accessible colonies.

The youngsters suckle for just three weeks before making their own way to the sea while the adults stay around and mate again to produce next year's offspring.



Gerry Crookes/CDS

Grey seal pup born at Donna Nook in November

## Natural learners

Derbyshire schoolchildren learned about managing a National Nature Reserve when they visited English Nature's Cressbrook Dale, part of the Derbyshire Dales NNR. The site is internationally important for its limestone grassland, woodland and geology.

Sixty-six pupils from Bishop Pursglove Church of England Primary School, in Tideswell, set out with loppers and bow-saws to help English Nature staff and volunteers cut back hawthorn scrub from the wildflower-rich grassland. Hawthorn needs to be controlled or it would spread and shade out the wildflowers. The children will return in summer to see the results of their work and learn more about the wildflowers which will be in bloom.

## Conservation lamb goes on the market

Hebridean lamb and mutton from a conservation project near York is now on sale to the public. The meat comes from a flock of 1,000 sheep grazing heathland on Skipwith, Allerthorpe and Strensall Commons.

Julian Small, English Nature's Vale of York Heathland Heritage Project Officer, said, "The Hebridean flocks are crucial for the conservation of these 3,000-year-old lowland heaths. Their grazing encourages new vegetation important for wildlife such as rare beetles, aphids and

caterpillars – themselves food for a wide variety of birds and small mammals. If it wasn't for these hardy sheep, coarse grasses, rushes and tree seedlings would smother the commons' smaller wildflowers and insects.

"The meat is delicious and unique and customers can eat well in the knowledge that they are helping to protect precious landscape and important wildlife."

English Nature's project office in York is the only place where you can buy Hebridean lamb and mutton grazed on lowland heathland under a UK conservation scheme.

*Lamb and mutton is available by the whole or half box and can be delivered across the UK. Lamb prices range from £77 - £44 a box/half box and mutton from £66 - £40 box/half box. Contact Julian Small on 01904 435511.*



Julian Small

Hebridean sheep on Strensall Common



# Schools take red kites under their wings

Hundreds of children have been building close relationships with the magnificent red kites which have come back to Gateshead's Lower Derwent Valley.

Over the last two years, the Northern Kites project has released 61 of the rare birds of prey from a breeding programme in the Chilterns, as part of a concerted effort to reintroduce them across the UK. Now, thanks to the project's adoption scheme, 43 schools from Newcastle to Chester-le-Street have taken a released bird under their wing and enjoyed seeing it build a new life in the wild. The "adopters" are introduced to their own kite and get regular updates on its progress. They learn about tracking equipment used to monitor the birds' movements and find out how they interact socially with other released kites.

It is hoped another 30 red kites will be released this year – the final year of the release programme - and these will also be up for adoption by schools.

For further information contact Melanie Bowden at the Northern Kites office on 0191 4961555.



Northern Kites Project officer Melanie Bowden introduces adopted red kite, Phoenix, at Ryton Community Junior School

## Springwatch – a picture of change

The results of the BBC's Springwatch Survey 2005 are now out, helping to provide the most detailed picture yet of Spring in the UK.

An amazing 157,000 observations were recorded last year including:

- Bumblebees and butterflies were seen, on average, about three weeks earlier than 30 years ago.
- Hawthorn flowered about two-and-a-half weeks earlier than 30 years ago.
- Swifts arrived about a week earlier than in recent warm years.
- One species of bumblebee, *bombus terrestris*, is raising an extra generation due to milder winters.

Now the *Springwatch* team is rallying support for the 2006 survey.

This year you are asked to keep a look-out and record sightings of any of the following six *Springwatch* species:

- Red-tailed bumblebee
- Peacock butterfly
- Frogspawn
- Hawthorn
- Ladybird
- Swift

Make a note of the date and the grid reference or postcode where you see any of these species for the first time. You can submit your results on-line by visiting <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/animals/wildbritain/springwatch/record>



*Springwatch* presenters Bill Oddie and Kate Humble



Look out for the peacock butterfly



As our landscape evolves and habitats change, England's wildlife is adapting by finding new, more unusual homes to live in.

"We expect to find wildlife in parks, gardens and National and Local Nature Reserves," said Editor, Amanda Giles, "but, in fact, wildlife is everywhere. It is just a matter of keeping our eyes and ears open as we go about our daily lives. On these pages, we visit some of the more unexpected places where we might make some remarkable discoveries."



Dave & Brian Bevan

Many people don't realise that hedgehogs are good swimmers. They sometimes get trapped in steep-sided garden ponds

# Tracking down treasures of the tube

As busy commuters rush around on the London Underground, wildlife is just about the last thing you would expect them to be thinking about.

In fact, the 350km of track which makes up the London Underground network is one of our most important green corridors, linking the capital's open spaces and helping wildlife to move around.

A new ecological survey by Metronet Rail, the company responsible for renewing two-thirds of the network, has started to uncover an exciting range of animals, birds and plants living alongside the tracks, in open cuttings and in trackside buildings.

Smooth and great-crested newts breed, forage and hibernate on dry grassland and woodland at the eastern end of the District Line, where grass snakes and slow worms have also been found. On the north western sections of the Metropolitan Line, badgers, foxes and even muntjac deer thrive in woodland and arable farmland adjoining the tracks.

The first phase of the survey covered the Metropolitan, District, East London, Hammersmith and City, Circle, Central, Bakerloo, and Victoria lines. Areas were graded as



Badgers live near the Metropolitan Line

having high, medium or low habitat potential. Analysis so far shows around 50 per cent of the land as woodland, 24 per cent grassland and 19 per cent scrub.

The wooded areas support numerous nesting birds, including surprise recordings of the wryneck near Buckhurst Hill on the Central Line in North East London, which is at the edge of its inland range. These tiny woodpeckers are scarce migrants usually found on south and east coasts, with only one to six breeding pairs recorded in Britain in recent years.

Metronet's Senior Environmental Manager, Suzie Bement, said, "The lines act as wildlife corridors, extending habitats, like woodland,





Metronet rail



Metronet rail

## The survey team check out the trackside wildlife

through the suburbs into the city and linking the parkland which provides London's vital open spaces. These are often the only bits of green that people see, benefiting communities around the tracks as well as the travelling public."

Trackside cabins appear to be important for bats and even the tunnels themselves provide a home for hundreds of mice and some pigeons.

"The depots and sidings turned out to be particularly interesting," said

which is an important forage species for invertebrates."

It is interesting how wildlife has adapted to such a busy and somewhat noisy environment, said Metronet Environmental Manager, Ewan Campbell-Lendrum. "The animals moved in partly because the infrastructure had been previously neglected and vegetation had overtaken the embankments. The animals which then chose to stay were obviously not much concerned about a little disturbance!"

All the information gathered by the ecologists is being recorded on hand-held computers and entered into a database, to guide a Biodiversity Action Plan which aims to enhance the wildlife value of the low and medium-rated areas. The results will contribute to the Mayor of London's biodiversity targets.

But wildlife on the underground can also cause problems and the information gathered will help to alleviate some of these. For instance, work sometimes needs to be scheduled to avoid important life cycles, like the spawning periods of newts or bird nesting times. Exclusion zones may be needed around a wildlife habitat or, as a last resort, it may be necessary to try and keep animals clear of unsafe areas while work is going on.



John Norton Associates

## A siding near Chorley Wood station on the Metropolitan Line

Jon Norton of Jon Norton Associates, ecologists co-ordinating the project. "They are officially classed as wasteland but are botanically diverse and often support a rich variety of invertebrates. They have been colonised by plants such as pale toadflax, ribbed melilot, yarrow, white clover, cat's ear and wild carrot



Paul Keene/Avico

Water voles have to be protected

## Working around wildlife

At the eastern end of the District Line in Dagenham, water voles use streams under culverts which needed to be repaired. Metronet works with wildlife experts to ensure they are not in the area when work has to be done and sets up 5-metre exclusion zones around any animals which are found.

The ages and species of trees are identified in the habitat database so they too can be protected while work is carried out. When the Snaresbrook embankment on the Central Line needed stabilising, an arboriculturalist was called in to pinpoint the roots of a group of 100-year-old mature oak trees in order to set up a barrier and work around them.



# Green scheme drives golf courses wild

A partnership between English Nature and the golfing world has led to the creation of some unlikely wildlife havens across the UK.



Fly agaric fungus in the rough at John O'Gaunt Golf Club

The traditional image of a golf course is of a man-made, sterile environment enjoyed by exclusive groups, and generally suspected of taking habitats away from wildlife.

But in recent years, the golfing fraternity has greened-up its approach and is making space for wildlife on its land. A range of important habitats are now being managed with conservation in mind. Walkers and golfers who keep their eyes peeled are likely to spot a colourful variety of

butterflies, ground-nesting birds and a range of reptiles and insects.

For some time English Nature has recognised the potential of around 1,900 golf courses in England covering 110,000 hectares of land – including 105 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 42 internationally important sites.

English Nature's Chief Scientist, Dr Keith Duff, who has been involved with environmental improvement in

the golf world for many years said, "Golf courses, contrary to popular belief, provide vital oases for wildlife among an ever-encroaching tide of developed land and monocultured farmland."

With this in mind he initiated the English Golf Environmental Advisory Service which tee'd off in 2002 with free ecological advice to over 180 clubs. This service is funded by a partnership of English Nature and golf's governing body, the English

## Saffron Walden Golf Club, Essex



Lee Penrose/STRI

### Saffron Walden Golf Club

Areas of deep, yet well-managed grassland are often used to define golf holes and provide punishment for the wayward golf shot.

Working with the English Golf Environmental Advisory Service, Saffron Walden Golf Club, in the grounds of Audley End, Essex, has developed several hectares of new rough grassland – a rare habitat, supporting ground-nesting birds, basking reptiles, overwintering invertebrates and foraging small mammals.

Course Manager, Ray Goodsall, said, "The grasslands on our new-look golf course now support a variety of butterflies, including Adonis blue and marbled white. Bee orchids have been recorded in several areas, as well as a pyramid orchid. We have been removing poplars and leylandii trees which were

planted to line the fairways but swamp other species and take nutrients from the soil. We are replacing them with copses of native hawthorn, blackthorn, oak and ash which not only look better, but also provide valuable habitats for butterflies and songbirds.

"We do our own leaf-mulching for compost, stack logs to provide homes for stag beetles and we are looking at providing a wider range of bird boxes to include owl and kestrel boxes."

The club uses specialist machinery to reduce chemical use, producing healthier turf, more resilient to diseases and pests.



Golf Union, and co-ordinated by ecologists at the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI), golf's advisory and research body.

Clubs are chosen from hundreds of hopefuls on the basis of potential benefits for local wildlife. They span the country from Bamburgh Castle Golf Club in Northumberland to Praa Sands Golf Club 540 miles away in Cornwall.

Clubs get an advisory visit and initial report. About 18 months later, their ecological progress is assessed to see if they merit the English Golf Environment Award.

Lee Penrose, STRI ecologist, said, "Basic environmental requirements include the proper management of woodland, hedgerows, water features, heathland, rough grassland and dune systems. More specialist topics include the creation of artificial hibernation chambers for bats and reptiles and the management of statutory protected species and habitats. The results so far have been tremendous."

So far, around 140 clubs have now had their assessment visit and 80 per cent have made enough progress to receive the award.

Between them, they have created over 80 hectares of well-managed rough grassland, planted around 16,000 trees, introduced or reinstated 14km of hedgerow and restored 10 hectares of heathland to good condition.

Many support their efforts with environmental initiatives, like recycling schemes, composting, reducing water use and energy-saving projects.



Lee added, "The Ecology Unit at STRI has been striving for over 15 years to improve the environmental perception of golf and, having worked with thousands of clubs throughout the UK and

Europe, we are now seeing tangible benefits for wildlife, the landscape and even golfers.

"The bad old days of inappropriate chemical use and over-watering are long gone and golf clubs are taking their ecological and environmental credentials very seriously."

## Pyecombe Golf Club, Sussex

One of the last remaining bastions of rare chalk heathland, Pyecombe Golf Club in Sussex, has been actively managing the entire 110 hectares of downland with wildlife given high priority.

A strong relationship with the Sussex Downs Conservation Board has developed since the club got involved with the initiative and real gains for wildlife are



Peter Wakeley/English Nature

Harebells were recorded at Pyecombe

evident. A range of interesting plants and animals has been recorded on the golf course including pyramid orchids, harebells, brimstone butterfly, woodcock, nightjar and great-crested newt.

Chairman of the Green, Richard Plummer, said, "To attract and retain such a notable list of species meant restoring chalk heath by scarification and turf-stripping trials to expose buried heather seed, developing scrub/grassland communities, creating and restoring ponds, and managing the gorse and woodland. We believe we have now made the course at Pyecombe a real wildlife haven."

## Farnham Golf Club, Surrey

The Surrey heathlands have declined dramatically over the past century through residential encroachment and foresting of the countryside. Many

golf clubs in the region are now investing time, money and effort into restoring this valuable habitat.



Peter Wakeley/English Nature

Grass snakes benefit at Farnham

The course at Farnham Golf Club has seen dramatic changes over the past couple of years with the removal of about 300 self-set and planted trees followed by the restoration of two hectares of acid grassland, giving a mosaic of species

including ling, bell heather, heath bedstraw, sheep's sorrel, and ribwort plantain

Greenkeeper, Peter McMorran, said, "The course is now looking much better and providing an excellent habitat for wildlife. Recordings have revealed a significant increase in species. Silver-studded blue butterfly and a host of other invertebrates, including a bee-killer wasp, have benefited directly, along with reptiles such as slow worm, adder and grass snake and common lizard."



# Water surprise!



British Waterways Photo Library

Our canals and waterways provide vital green corridors, linking the countryside with our towns and cities – and they are used by a surprising array of wildlife.

Ninety-two sightings of frogs were recorded

A survey by British Waterways revealed some rare animals and birds living on the UK's canal and river network.

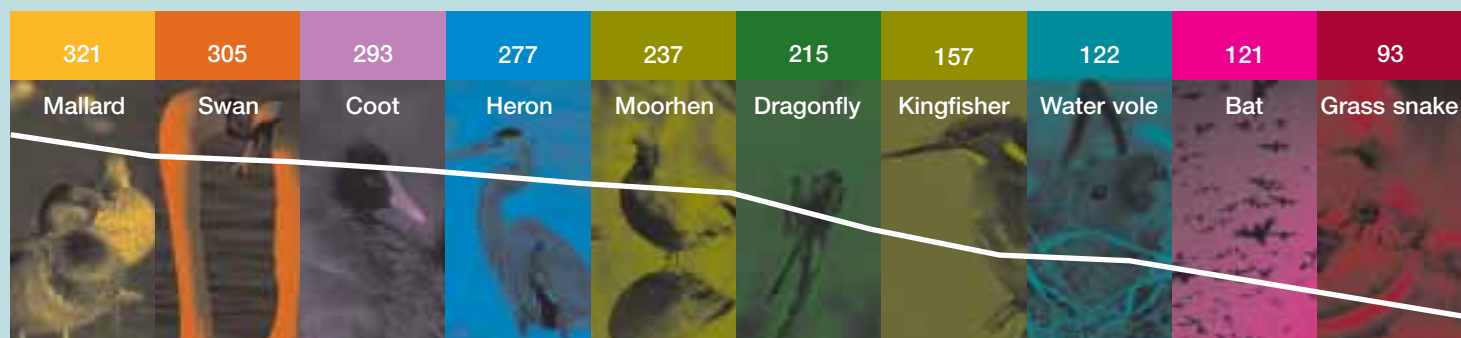
The hundreds of visitors who took part identified mallards, swans, moorhens, herons and coots as the top five – but there were also some unexpected sightings, such as seals, dolphins, porpoises, osprey and even a small crocodile.

People recorded over 3,700 sightings of 60 different species, including some of the UK's rarest species, like endangered water voles, otters and the elusive kingfisher. One-in-eight people spotted mallards and swans while one-in-20 observed kingfishers and water voles.

There was cause for concern that one-in-20 people also reported seeing American mink – a highly-predatory

## Wildlife survey 2005 – Top Ten UK Waterway Wildlife Revealed

### Number of Records



### Percentage spotted





Mute swan – in the top 10

invasive species. Other non-natives included terrapins and Chinese mitten crabs.

Records were submitted from all parts of the 2,000 miles of waterways, from the tranquil waters of the Kennet and Avon in Wiltshire, to the Grand Union canal, which runs through Birmingham and London city centres.

The seals were spotted in Carron Sea Lock, Scotland, and the dolphins and porpoises in Moray Firth, Scotland. The osprey was recorded near the Oxford Canal in Oxfordshire and the report of a small crocodile came from the Stroudwater Canal in Gloucestershire.

British Waterways' National Ecologist, Jonathan Brickland, said, "Some amazing wildlife has been spotted on our waterways and we want to encourage even more people to visit our canals and rivers and enjoy the rich variety of animals and plants found there. While we were surprised to find a crocodile and osprey listed, we are not ruling these out until further investigations have taken place."

The results of the 2005 survey, launched last summer by Kate Humble, co-presenter of the BBC's *Springwatch* programme, will be entered onto a national species database and will help guide the management of our inland waterways.



Otters – one of the rare species spotted on the waterways

British Waterways Photo Library

Peter Wakeley/English Nature

# Laying bare a hidden habitat

Next time you walk round a wildlife site and pass an apparently bare patch of ground, why not stop and take a closer look?

Bare ground is, in fact, an important wildlife habitat. It provides germination sites for plants, and warm areas where invertebrates and reptiles can build nests and hunt.

One creature that needs patches of bare, sun-drenched sand in order to breed successfully is the sand lizard. The soil in these areas is warmer than under vegetation, so the eggs can develop more rapidly.

English Nature has published a leaflet, *Management of bare ground*. It highlights the benefits for wildlife, explains how bare ground might be formed and concludes with a brief look at how to create and maintain this feature.



Roger Key

The red banded sand wasp, *Ammophila sabulosa*, drags a caterpillar into its burrow

Bare ground can be formed as a result of a fire, wear and tear by animals, or shallow soil over hard rock, the latter being ideal for slower growing organisms such as lichens.

Isabel Alonso, English Nature's Heathland Ecologist, said, "We are keen to raise awareness among site managers of the importance of creating and managing patches of bare ground."

The leaflet can be downloaded from English Nature's website ([www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk)) or you can request a copy from the Enquiry Service: Call 01733 455100/1/2 or email: [enquiries@english-nature.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@english-nature.org.uk)





## FOCUS ON... Stodmarsh NNR

A new wetland habitat has brought a whole host of birds flocking to Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve.

Snipe, green sandpipers, lapwing and redshank are making the most of a new wader scrape, delighting hundreds of visitors who watch them at the north Kent reserve. Reedbeds, shallow lagoons and flooded river meadows already provided a haven for a variety of breeding and migrating birds, seen from a network of five hides and an observation mound, all linked by footpaths.

Then English Nature's Site Manager, Dave Feast, devised a plan to create better birdwatching opportunities around the Harrison's Drove hide which was left high and dry when water levels dropped in summer, with little to attract birds.

The area in front of the hide was dug away, varying the depths to suit birds which thrive in muddy areas and those which like deep water. Two high points were retained as grass-covered islands.



Harrison's Drove hide

Dave said, "Visitors are now enjoying great views of the birds and the spectacular landscape. January can be an excellent time to visit – if it is cold and we get snow we should see white-fronted geese and, maybe Bewick swans. There are already 5,000 lapwing here which should stay all winter, 3,000 teal and a small number of overwintering ruff. We have 1,000 wigeon feeding on the meadow and lots of marsh harriers hunting in the area."

Stodmarsh is a Special Protection Area (SPA) for overwintering hen harriers. It is one of English Nature's spotlight reserves – the best places to enjoy wildlife in ideal surroundings.

Mining subsidence originally formed the marshland with its large reedbeds, lakes, ditches, meadows and wet woodland. Mallard, gadwall, shoveler and pochard ducks breed and the reserve has the first breeding record for Cetti's warbler in the UK.



Kingfisher can be seen from the Turf Field hide at Stodmarsh

### Watch out for wildlife

Visitors may also spot interesting invertebrates like the nationally-rare shining ram's-horn snail, obscure wainscot and silky wainscot moths.

Rare plants include the carnivorous greater bladderwort, greater spearwort, whorled water milfoil, soft hornwort, bog bean, sharp-leaved pondweed and rootless duckweed.

### How to get there

- The reserve is on the Great Stour river in the Stour Valley between Canterbury and Margate.
- The nearest villages are Upstreet on the A28 and Stodmarsh. There are car parks in Stodmarsh, reached by minor roads from the A28 and A257, and in Grove Ferry from the A28.
- The nearest train station is in Sturry, 5km to the south west and there are regular bus services along the A28 from Sturry to Upstreet.
- There is access to and around the reserve for wheelchair users, families with push-chairs and visitors with mobility problems.

### Where to walk

- A 1.3km easy access nature trail reached from Stodmarsh, passes through coppiced alder & poplar woodland, past reedbeds and over the flood protection barrier to the Reedbed hide.
- A 1km walk goes from the raised mound overlooking the flooded area, via the Turf Field hide (good for kingfisher, ducks, heron and bittern) ending up at Harrison's Drove hide



FEBRUARY 2006

## The flight lieutenants

Part of an army training ground in North Yorkshire provides an unusual base for hundreds of resident and migrant birds.

Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve (LNR) at Catterick Garrison, is one of the most important bird ringing sites in the UK. The 30-hectare reserve has been one of the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) 'constant effort' ringing sites for 13 years and over 28,000 birds of 65 species have been recorded.

Under the scheme, ringers put up mist nets in the same places, for the same time period, on the same day, from the beginning of May to the end of August each year. This consistent method provides data on how many migrants are returning, how many birds breed successfully

shows just 124 ringed in 2004 compared with 335 in previous years."

It is not all bad news, though. Bullfinches are doing well and reed bunting, which was declining, is now showing a substantial increase.

Common summer migrants to Foxglove include chiffchaff, garden warbler and blackcap while brambling, siskin and lesser redpoll are regular winter visitors. Resident birds such as song thrush, woodcock, kingfisher and nuthatch reflect the variety of habitats on the site.

The reserve, which supports 1,600 wildlife species, was set aside for conservation by the Ministry of Defence in 1992 and declared an LNR in 2001. A field centre with a bird-ringing room and interactive



Sam Hackett/Foxglove Covert LNR



Sam Hackett/Foxglove Covert LNR



Foxglove Covert LNR

Summer migrants to Foxglove also include the grasshopper warbler (left) and turtle dove (centre) while the little owl (right) is a resident.

and the effects of weather conditions. Over time, this demonstrates which species are thriving and which are in decline.

English Nature Conservation Officer, Colin Newlands, a reserve trustee, said, "It was generally accepted that the willow warbler has been a common migrant to the UK but it is now in serious decline. This is borne out by data produced from Foxglove. The recently published annual report

educational facilities for visitors was opened in 2002.

The public are encouraged to enjoy watching the birds and other wildlife on the reserve but, as access is through the army barracks, visitors are asked to collect a pass from the guard room on arrival.

For more information call 01748 831113 or visit <http://usite.army.mod.uk/foxglovecovert>

Feb 18-19

### Lee Valley Birdwatching and Wildlife Fair

9.30-16.00 Lee Valley Park Farm, Waltham Abbey, Essex

England's third largest bird fair, sponsored by English Nature. For everyone from the novice to the serious birdwatcher. This special event attracts enthusiasts from all over Europe, because of Lee Valley's reputation as the best place in the country to see bittern. The 1,000 acre River Lee Country park is a major habitat and a refuge for overwintering birds.

With guided birdwatching tours and field watching stations; wildlife artists; wildlife gardening information; children's activities; indoor exhibitions and trade stands in heated marquees selling everything from binoculars to country fudge.

Enjoy a two-day programme of stalls, lectures and presentations including information about English Nature projects.



Contact: Lee Valley Park  
information service 01992 702200

### Brilliant for birds

Some top spots to watch birds on NNRs this spring are:

#### The Lower Derwent Valley, N Yorks:

Hear the call of lapwing, curlew and skylark. Early morning brings "drumming" snipe and territorial disputes between mallard, teal, shoveler and gadwall.

**The Lizard, Cornwall:** Ravens are nesting, peregrine falcons check out old breeding sites and fulmars take up position on the ledges. Inland, buzzards display and golden plover flocks wheel about.

**Cavenham Heath, Suffolk:** Woodlarks sing and display from early February onwards. Redwing, fieldfare and lapwing gather for migration.

Read more about birdwatching on NNRs in English Nature's booklet *Get close to birds* available from the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100 or email [enquiries@english-nature.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@english-nature.org.uk)



# Working out an active remedy

There is no doubt that our lifestyles have changed dramatically in recent years – with significant impact on the nation's health.

Our children sit in front of computers or watch television, rather than playing outside or riding bicycles. They are more likely to be driven to school than to walk. As a result, one in ten six-year-olds in England is now reported to be obese.

On the other hand, people are living longer. But while older people are found to be more focused on their health, they tend to do less physical activity as they get older.

The mental health of the nation is also an increasing cause for concern. Sixteen per cent of adults in the UK now have a mental illness, while reports of emotional and hyperactivity problems in children have more than doubled between 1974 and 1999. This is the picture which unfolds

in a report commissioned by the Natural England partners to examine links between outdoor recreation and health.

It is already recognised that outdoor recreation has a positive effect on our health, providing exercise, clean air, solitude or social interaction and a feeling of wellbeing generated by simply being in contact with nature. The country agencies contribute to Government health targets by creating opportunities for outdoor activities and wild places where people can enjoy nature.

When English Nature, parts of the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service join forces in October 2006 as Natural England, the new body will need a robust Outdoor

Recreation strategy to guide its actions on this issue.

English Nature's People and Nature Recreation Officer, Chris Gordon, said, "Some of the questions we will have to ask ourselves are: How do we, as an organisation, go about influencing people's behaviour? Do we concentrate on working with health professionals or do we reach out directly to individuals?"

The report explores links between outdoor recreation, health and Government spending. With one-in-five adults diagnosed as clinically obese, physical inactivity is estimated to cost the country £8 billion a year through sickness and absence from work. Spending on anti-depressants rose from £15 million to £395 million between 1991 and 2000, so should psychiatrists be encouraged to promote outdoor recreation as an alternative to drugs as some GPs are already doing?

## A forum for change



Environment Minister Jim Knight launched the Forum's inaugural meeting in London. It includes the Natural England partners (see above) the Environment Agency, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and sporting bodies like Sport England and the British Horse Society.

Limbering up at Beckenham Place Park Green Gym

A new Outdoor Health Forum will pull together 60 organisations with an interest in the health benefits of the outdoors.

The group will now drive forward partnership work to meet Government health targets. It will help health professionals to tap into

health and recreation initiatives, so they can choose to prescribe options like Green Gyms and health walking initiatives, in appropriate cases.

Four working groups will co-ordinate different areas of the initiative:

- Physical wellbeing – looking at exercise and physical activity.
- Mental wellbeing – examining different therapies like working with horses or wildlife gardening.
- Environmental quality – looking at pollution, availability of, and access to, green space.
- Research – co-ordinating available data across the sectors.





### Telly addicts – an unhealthy lifestyle

Linking outdoor recreation too closely with physical activity may overshadow the “softer wellbeing” benefits, the report warns, and put off those who just want a relaxing inactive experience.

“Where we have an aging population who are gradually moving away from strenuous activities and young people who have become disassociated from outdoor recreation, do we need some gentler steps?” said Chris.

“We need to come up with varied forms of outdoor activities which build confidence, interest and enthusiasm. If we can get people out and about, they will not just benefit from being active, but will also find time to appreciate the wildlife and nature all around them.”

Activities like the Countryside Agency’s Walking the way to Health

“Our children sit in front of computers or watch television, rather than playing outside or riding bicycles. They are more likely to be driven to school than to walk. As a result, one in ten six-year-olds in England is now reported to be obese.”

Initiative and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers’ Green Gyms are highlighted as successful examples. (See pages 16-17) Wendy Thompson, the Countryside Agency’s Programme Manager for Recreation Strategy, said, “The report raises lots of complex issues to get our teeth into, and gives the partners a good starting point for working together to find the best way forward in this important area.”

*The report by the Henley Centre Healdlight Vision, a futures consultancy, is part of a set of papers dealing with outdoor recreation, covering demand, supply, planning and health. They are available on the Countryside Agency website [www.Countryside.gov.uk](http://www.Countryside.gov.uk)*



Outdoor pursuits help children to stay fit

## Healthy recovery

Concepts directly linking patient care with the environment will be developed more widely following a health conference held in Exeter.

A working group from English Nature, Government Office South West and HEFMA (the Health Estates Facilities Management Association) has been examining opportunities for increasing biodiversity on Health Trust land. This ranges from small projects, like courtyard planting to large-scale initiatives, including wildflower meadow, woodland and heathland management.

English Nature’s People and Nature Development Manager, Dave Stone, said, “The focus is on improving patient care and outcomes. It has already been established that where patients have an attractive outlook it reduces recovery time and the need for pain-relief medication.



Meadow flowers create a feeling of wellbeing

“We are developing ideas on how health services can improve their environment for the benefit of both patients and staff.”

The group agreed to work more directly with patients and health trusts. HEFMA Southwest will provide new guidance on the contract management of land and will collate and share ideas on improving environments.

Hospital Art see page 20.



# Volcano walk is hot on health

It is a crisp, sunny, winter's day and Alan Sherwood has just returned from a stimulating walk around Dudley's Barrow Hill Local Nature Reserve.



Action Heart walkers stride out around Barrow Hill



Alan feels healthy and happy. He has enjoyed soaking up the atmosphere of the rugged countryside – an ancient volcanic hill colonised by species-rich grassland – watching and listening to the birds on the reserve, while getting vital physical exercise.

But 15 years ago it was a different picture. As a high-pressure salesman covering 19,000 miles a year to chase deals for his company, Alan, then 52, suffered a heart attack out on the road and found himself on the wards in Russell's Hall Hospital, Dudley.

Russell's Hall Hospital is the base for Action Heart, one of the UK's biggest cardiac rehabilitation

programmes. There, Alan, one of around 700 people looked after by the project at any one time, was put onto an intense personal recovery programme.

The hospital is lucky enough to have the recently-declared LNR just five minutes outside its back door. Recovering patients have access to a network of waymarked routes where they can head out in groups of 20-30 about twice a week, to carry out their exercise regimes.

Alan, now recovered and a volunteer for the Action Heart centre, makes sure he finds time to join in the walks, organised under the umbrella of the national Walking the way to Health Initiative (WHI).

He said, "While you are walking, you feel so relaxed and forget about any stresses you may have. You get to be at one with your surroundings, while doing the exercise that you need. We have some beautiful countryside around here but people

Barrow Hill Pond





do not realise it. All you have to do is get off the road.

“There are plenty of walks on the flat if you don’t want to push too hard. The project gives you the confidence to do a lot more than you did before, while watching your pulse rate – and suddenly you feel a lot better for it.”



Action Heart recommends a “holistic” approach to recovery – combining exercise with equally important stress-management and lifestyle changes, says walking co-ordinator, Paul Davies-Hale.

He explained, “We know that walking outdoors can build stamina and confidence, help with weight control, reduce stress and the risks of heart disease. We have the perfect setting in the Barrow Hill Reserve, where people can stride out and achieve a certain level of exertion while gaining a general feeling of wellbeing from their surroundings.

“It’s not just a stroll, though – there is an induction process, exercise and stress tests and heart rate targets, to meet with the WHI guidelines.”

On the way, the walkers may spot grass snakes and rare butterflies, like the dingy skipper and green-hair streak while a glance in the ponds may reveal rare great-crested newts. The reserve supports a wide variety of wildlife including bats and badgers.

## Factfile:

- The Walking the way to Health Initiative (WHI) was set up by the Countryside Agency and British Heart Foundation, with cash from the New Opportunities Fund, to get more people walking to benefit their health.
- Regular walking is known to improve stamina, energy, life expectancy and confidence, help with weight control and reduce the risks of heart disease, strokes, diabetes, high blood pressure and stress.
- Wildspace! grants from the Big Lottery Fund were distributed through English Nature to local authorities, wildlife trusts and charitable groups to create more green space, especially in disadvantaged areas.
- The Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF), run by English Nature and the Countryside Agency, gives grants to reduce the impact of quarrying on local communities and the environment.
- Green Gyms are run by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) to help people get fit through practical conservation activities outdoors.



Barrow Hill Cross

## Around Barrow Hill

- Barrow Hill is of great scientific interest - formed from the remnants of a 300 million-year-old volcano.
- Disused quarries expose impressive rock faces, showing evidence of the Dudley volcano, while spoil heaps support calcareous species like carline thistle and hound’s tongue.
- In 2002, a £76,000 Wildspace! Grant from English Nature for enhancing nature reserves, meant Dudley Council could improve management, prepare interpretative material and take on staff including a part-time interpretation officer.
- A £28,000 Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF) grant, won early last year in partnership with the Black Country Geological Society, funded work to promote the geology and improve access.
- The LNR was declared in July 2005. Consultations on the declaration drew together all the interested parties and sparked a new partnership, culminating in a joint LNR launch at the Action Health centre.
- The partners worked together to improve waymarking, surfaces and gradients to make Barrow Hill more accessible while ensuring the work was appropriate for a nature reserve and not too intrusive.
- They are now letting local people know about the benefits of Barrow Hill and aim to set up a Green Gym project and walking and running groups on the reserve.





### A PLEASANT SURPRISE

Perfection – a solitary primrose



© Nick Baker

Nick Baker

One of the good things about an interest in nature is that it really can come at you from any direction and often when you may least expect it.

During the winter this tendency is amplified because we are likely to notice more. This may be down to the general perception that the countryside is 'dead' right now and anything moving catches our eye, or simply because, with no leaf cover around, more shows up.

Last year on New Year's Day I decided to go for a stroll to work off a little of the season's excess. To my surprise, I noticed, peeking up from the dank leaf mould on a south-facing bank, an example of absolute floral perfection - one solitary primrose.

It was not the location that was surprising, but its timing. Maybe its exceptionally early appearance was due to a warmer winter than usual, augmented by the south-facing aspect, or perhaps it was just a mutant flower that didn't read the usual seasonal cues.

So, having found that little ray of sunshine, I decided to keep my eyes open for other wildflowers on my walk. After a couple of hours I had

quite an impressive tally: hazel, winter heliotrope, coltsfoot, butterbur, dandelion, daisy, shepherd's purse, groundsel, periwinkle, chick weed, celandine and, of course, gorse.

And it isn't only plants that can throw these surprises. A local bird enthusiast showed me a picture of an unusual black and white, diminutive penguin-like bird which dropped out of the sky one grey Sunday afternoon in February a few years ago and took up residence in an urban garden pond, alongside the Koi carp.

The bird in question was obviously not a penguin (they don't fly and so find dropping out of the sky anywhere, let alone in Reading, rather difficult!) but it obviously felt better in the water than out of it. It turned out to be a little auk, a small sea bird that occasionally gets blown off-course or confused for some reason and ends up in places where it really shouldn't be - a mysterious occurrence that is known to those who study them as a 'wreck'.

Anyone who feeds the local wildlife via that well-known interface, the bird table, may well notice certain species overcoming their usual coyness to satisfy that other important survival

need – sustenance. The colder the weather, the stranger things tend to get.

Not only do the cool species turn up which we expect, like long-tailed tits and the occasional stay-over blackcap. In a recent cold snap I awoke to find a heron perched on top of my dad's bird table. I have no idea why. There is no free-standing water close by other than a bird bath and it would certainly have little interest in the bag of nuts.

Other species I have personally witnessed making the most of



Dave Bevan/Avioco

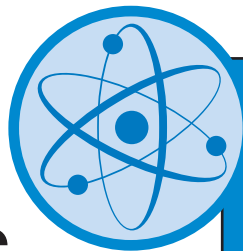
A surprise visitor – a heron fishes in a domestic pond

handouts are badgers, foxes, pine martens, fallow deer and muntjac and a buzzard with a penchant for roast potatoes. The only one that didn't actually climb up onto the bird table proper was the fallow deer!

**Nick Baker is a presenter with the BBC's Really Wild Show**



# Gardening with wildlife in mind



If you feel active at this time of year, it's a good time to:

- Plant a hedge, if the ground is soft. Use young, bare-rooted trees (whips) and choose wildlife-friendly native species like hawthorn, hazel, wild privet and guelder rose. When these are established, add climbers like the invaluable ivy and honeysuckle.
- Prune established hedges. Do it now before early-nesting blackbirds set up home.
- Clean old bird-boxes and put up new ones. If the birds didn't use them last year, move them to a different place. Entrances should not face strong sunlight and should also be positioned away from the prevailing wind. North-facing entrances may be best. Birds won't nest in boxes attached to feeders as there is too much disturbance in their vicinity.

However, if you're a fair weather gardener, January is an excellent time for planning what you might do for wildlife when temperatures rise.

The latest English Nature wildlife gardening booklet – *Mammals in your garden* – is a good read and has some quite stunning photographs. Get this and the other ten titles in the series from the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/101/102 or e-mail [enquiries@english-nature.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@english-nature.org.uk)



Dave & Brian Bevan

If you prefer to browse the web, have a look at the on-line version of *Gardening with wildlife in mind*, reachable from [www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk) First published on CD, the web version retains all the original information and features 500 wildlife-friendly garden plants and

An uncommon visitor to our gardens

300 of the more common creatures, from insects to birds, with which these plants are linked. New species will be added during the year.

## Science update

One way we share our scientific knowledge with others is through a series of English Nature Research Reports (ENRRs). Here are some of the current hot topics.

### ENRR 641 'Opportunity maps' for landscape-scale conservation of biodiversity: A good practice study



Biollisland Wessex Downs

Keith Porter / English Nature

Opportunity maps set out where habitats could or should be created. English Nature commissioned this study of the experience of people involved in 'opportunity' or nature mapping. The aim is to

capture some key lessons learned so that good practice can be shared. Around 40 opportunity mapping initiatives are either completed, in use, or under development across England.

Opportunity maps and the processes which underlie them are still at an early stage in the UK, though there is more experience of this approach elsewhere in Europe. They can make a valuable contribution to informing or influencing the agendas for shaping the future environment.

### ENRR 628 A veteran tree site assessment protocol

The importance of veteran trees has been increasingly recognised over the last 10 years. However there has been no agreed protocol for assessing the value of sites on the basis of their veteran tree populations. A methodology was suggested by woodland specialists and has been refined by field trials on a variety of sites.

The report details this process and makes recommendations for thresholds. It sets out ways of identifying veteran trees based on tree features, and which other site characteristics should be recorded to assess the site's value.

For a full list and electronic copies of recently published ENRRs, visit the publications section of

our website on [www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk) or contact our Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/01/02, email [enquiries@english-nature.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@english-nature.org.uk) for a printed version.



Oak tree at Cirencester Park

Rebecca Isted / English Nature





The stained glass window *Roman Views* with its medicinal herbs

# A picture of health

Artworks depicting tranquil scenes and the local countryside are creating a “healing environment” in a Chichester hospital.

The importance of having the right ambience to assist patients’ recovery is now recognised by many health professionals.

At St Richard’s hospital in Chichester, this is valued so highly that a long-term environmental art programme has been put in place to ensure that the surroundings instil feelings of wellbeing among patients, visitors and staff.

People who are well enough to sit outside have access to peaceful courtyards, one of which is designed in a calming Roman theme, using herbs and plants known for their relaxing properties.

And for those who are unable to venture out at all, the environment is designed to bring the outdoors in. Every ward has a garden view and beds are arranged so that every patient can see a picture. Artworks are rotated so that people get a change of scene.



Pictures of nature create a healing environment



The Roman courtyard is a peaceful haven

Director of Planning, Nick Fox, said, “We know that getting out into nature creates a feeling of wellbeing and contributes to a speedy recovery. But some people are too ill to leave the hospital environment and our idea at St Richard’s is to bring the image of nature to the patient.”

The *Art for St Richard’s* project began when art was used to decorate the hospital’s new 400-bed wing, built in 1996. Nick explained, “The art at St Richard’s is seen as an integral part of our building. We were very keen that the environment in the new block was conducive to creating the right atmosphere for good health care and patient and staff morale.”

A special art fund was set up and the project was extended across the hospital. Now a fixed exhibition of around 30-40 works adorns the wards with around 100 paintings and 250 prints, some rotated round the hospital, plus seven sculptures around the building and courtyards.

An arts panel made up of staff and local people from the art world selects the works to ensure the right balance. Many of the artists are local, so the surrounding landscape plays a big part.

## The artworks

- Artist David Watson portrayed a landscape of *Chichester Harbour* by collecting rushes, grasses, leaves and other materials from the Site of Special Scientific Interest. The picture, spanning three panels, is created with paper handmade from pulp, coloured to reflect the environment.
- *Roman Views* is a stained glass window reflecting the courtyard beyond and the ground-floor theme *Gardens and Downs*. Windows depict wildflowers like field poppies and thrift –used by the Romans to cure sore throats and other herbs used in Roman medicine. Another panel shows how the Romans used Fishbourne Harbour, and a curlew, commonly seen on the mud at low tide.
- Embroidered hangings entitled *Panorama* portray Chichester and its surrounding countryside.
- A whale’s tail has been carved from the forked branch of an ancient oak blown down by gales in 1987 to create a sculpture called *Fluke*.

The project is guided by an art advisor, Geoff Metcalf, a former art teacher at London and West Surrey art colleges. He set up the business linking art and health with his late wife, Amanda, also an artist, who conceived the idea during a long stay in hospital.

Geoff said, “The primary purpose is to make the environment more stimulating for patients, visitors and staff. Everyone reacts differently to art and we have to choose work which is not disturbing to anyone, which will relax and stimulate people, and generally help to raise their spirits.”