

# Wild

Summer 2020

Berkshire,  
Buckinghamshire  
& Oxfordshire

## GREEN SHOOTS

Time has come for  
wildlife's revival

## 60 YEARS YOUNG!

BBOWT celebrates its  
diamond jubilee



SUMMER SPOTTING

# Bug's eye view

There's a miniature jungle to be explored

Berkshire  
Buckinghamshire  
Oxfordshire



# Welcome

## Time for a new normal



Covid-19 has shaken our world. Like all charities, BBOWT has taken a financial hit, as our education and visitor centres had to close, losing us vital income. Our conservation work has also been impacted – you can read more about this on page 6.

Lockdown was tough on everyone, but with it came a seismic change as more people fell under nature's spell. The rumble of traffic quietened, flights were cancelled, the air cleared and we migrated to our gardens and parks. We started to walk and cycle, to live in the present. Many of us found solace in nature; wildlife undoubtedly contributed to our physical and mental wellbeing as we reconnected with the rhythms of the natural world. Personally, it not only helped me cope but reminded me why I love this job so deeply.

Could this be the turning point, when humanity realises its utter dependency on nature? Have our values shifted to a more balanced, less frenetic pace of life? Let's hope so! The bounce-back begins here and, like everyone, we expect a new normal to emerge.

Yet the battle for nature's recovery and climate stability rages on. We will continue the local fight, playing our part in this global challenge. We've made the case for more ambition on nature's recovery, and will of course do our utmost to protect precious wild places and the wildlife found within them (see page 14 for more on this).

We look forward to welcoming back our army of volunteers and reopening our centres soon. In the meantime, thank you so much for sticking with us – the battle to safeguard the wildlife of our three counties would be lost without you.

Estelle Bailey, Chief Executive



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Six decades  
fighting for wildlife



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Escape to the great outdoors



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Covid-19

## Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust *Get in touch*

**Wild Berks, Bucks & Oxon** is the membership magazine for **Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust**

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Wherever you are in the country your Wildlife Trust is standing up for wildlife and wild places in your area and bringing people closer to nature.

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Enjoy the extended version of *Wild Berks, Bucks & Oxon* online at **[bbowt.org.uk/publications](http://bbowt.org.uk/publications)**



# Your wild summer

The best of the season's wildlife, and where to enjoy it on your local patch

*You are helping*

Bats are under increasing threat from habitat loss. As a member your support helps protect them – including very rare species such as the Bechstein's bat. Find out what else your support means at [bbowt.org.uk/about](http://bbowt.org.uk/about)



## SUMMER SPECTACLE

### Swooping bats

When you think about it, bats are mammals to be revered, not feared. The smallest UK species, the pipistrelles, weigh no more than a 2p piece and yet, like every other bat it's a masterpiece of design: capable of producing milk for its young, with on-board sonar and wafer-thin wings that unfold in an instant to enable it to agilely swish, swoop and glide with uncanny precision. There are 17 types of bats resident in the UK, and they all eat insects – the common pipistrelle can get through 500 an hour! They feed at night using echolocation, pinging sound off their prey to work out where they are before swooping in to nab them. At this time of year feeding really picks up; it's a race against time to fatten up before hibernating for winter.

#### SEE THEM THIS SUMMER

- **Finemere Wood** The shadiest areas of the wood are roosting sites for rare Bechstein's bats.
- **Letcombe Valley** Daubenton's bats swoop low across the surface of the Letcombe Brook.
- **Loddon Nature Reserve** Bats gorge on the rich insect life found at this flooded gravel pit.

Bats like the common pipistrelle have a busy schedule. They must feed as much as possible to prepare for winter, while mating also occurs in autumn.



# Summertime's easy living

Leave the trials and tribulations of modern life behind

## Cool, calm and composted

Woodlands offer a shady retreat on hot summer days. Walk beneath their leafy boughs and a sense of calm instantly descends. These are secret places, secluded refuges from the mad and busy world outside. Woodlands are blessed with their own very special wildlife. Woodpeckers drum their urgent staccato beats, making nests in the holes they painstakingly excavate or, if lucky, find. Owls like the tawny owl add a further sense of mystery; their familiar 'twit twoo' call is in fact two – the first part from the female, the second the male's reply. Then there's the legion of thrushes, warblers and tits seeking cover in the undergrowth or living high up in the canopy – a refuge within the refuge.

Marvel at the canopy above but take time to scan the woodland floor. Its earthy smell is the product of nature's composting miracle. Here a

universe of fungi, beetles, worms and microorganisms convert autumn's fallen leaves into a rich layer of humus, fuelling the food chain from the ground up.

### ESCAPE THIS SUMMER

- **Dancersend with Pavis Woods** Pavis Woods is home to old boundary beech trees and sunken tracks, both centuries-old features of these remarkable woods.
- **Bowdown Woods** This ancient woodland has glorious views across the Kennet Valley. Watch for basking butterflies like the white admiral in the clearing.

Go behind the scenes of our magnificent Finemere Wood with volunteer warden Charlotte Karmali's regular blog: [bbowt.org.uk/blog/charlotte-karmali](http://bbowt.org.uk/blog/charlotte-karmali)



Old school  
Just 1.2% of the  
country is covered in  
ancient woodland.

## Camp in the garden

The lockdown saw many of us escape to the wilds of our gardens. If you've not tried a night under canvas in the garden, give it a go! It's a great way to experience the sights, sounds and smells of neighbourhood wildlife up close and personal.



### DO THIS

Dry weather is tough on birds, so put out some water. Bird baths need to be somewhere with good visibility, with cover close by for nervous birds. Change the water regularly.

### DIG THIS

Fish-free ponds are one of the best features for attracting new wildlife. Autumn is a great time of year to dig one. Discover how to make and plant one at [bbowt.org.uk/pond](http://bbowt.org.uk/pond)

### We're going on a bug hunt

Spend an afternoon hunting for bugs. Look under leaf litter, in the compost heap, among the herbaceous perennials...

#### Green shieldbug

Often seen sunbathing in late summer, this sap-sucking bug is sometimes called the green stink bug because of the smell it secretes when disturbed.



#### Violet ground beetles

These shiny black beetles are typically found under logs and stones by day. At night they hunt for slugs and other insects, making them superb garden allies.



#### Field grasshopper

Look and listen out on sunny days for the chirrup of the males among the grass. They make their courting sound by rubbing their legs against their wings.



# Enjoy even more from BBOWT

Can't get out as much as you'd like? Want to do more to help local wildlife? Or simply craving more nature-themed nuggets? Here's how to stay connected, up-to-date and enjoy even more from your local Wildlife Trust

### Nature Notes

Signup to Nature Notes, our regular free newsletter, to receive emails packed with feel-good activities that bring wildlife and wild places to you.

The lockdown has seen us share encouragement, wildlife sightings, and nature-based facts and fun guaranteed to inspire and uplift. Featured topics include projects to ignite your children's interest in nature, advice on how to enjoy garden wildlife and green-fingered gardening tips, with inspiration for those who don't have a garden too.

There's lots to read, watch and listen to, including know-how from our team of experts and enthusiasts, so you can help wildlife and get involved no matter what the restrictions imposed by coronavirus.



Sign up at [bbowt.org.uk/newsletter](http://bbowt.org.uk/newsletter)

### What's on?

The situation regarding Covid-19 is rapidly evolving which, as you can imagine, makes planning exceptionally hard! We hope to resume our busy events programme as soon as it is practical and safe to do so.

The best way to stay up-to-date with the very latest situation is to sign up to Nature Notes, so you are among the first to be informed when our events restart. You can also visit [bbowt.org.uk/events](http://bbowt.org.uk/events) for details of what's on, when the time comes. We look forward to seeing you in person again very soon!



### Social butterflies

During the lockdown we created a range of online activities to encourage members to tune in to wildlife at home – and help people find solace in nature during these tough times.

Wildlife experts usually found leading school visits, events or talking to visitors on reserves have turned to leading online family wildlife ID events, blogging about how to become a citizen scientist in your own back garden, producing video insights into native trees, or running guess-the-pollinator quizzes.

From the reactions and messages received on social media, it was apparent that people were treasuring the wildlife they found close to home, with people getting in touch to tell us when they spotted their first butterflies or to share new visitors to

their gardens. These are joyful moments that people will hold dear long after the lockdown.

You can catch up on anything you missed and look forward to plenty more fresh and engaging content by following our social media channels and subscribing to the BBOWT YouTube channel, where you'll also find our popular wildlife gardening videos and podcasts.

- youtube.com/BBOWildlifeTrust
- facebook.com/bbowwildlifetrust
- twitter.com/bbowt
- flickr.com/photos/bbowt
- pinterest.com/bbowt
- instagram.com/bbowt



# WILD NEWS

All the latest local and national news from The Wildlife Trusts

There's more...  
Keep up to date. Sign  
up to our e-newsletter  
at [bbowt.org.uk/  
newsletter](https://bbowt.org.uk/newsletter)

HOT TOPIC

## Beyond the pandemic

Looking after nature reserves became difficult during the pandemic as vital conservation work had to be put on hold.

"The lockdown meant volunteers were unable to help," explains Ecology Manager Debbie Lewis. "This has left more competitive plants like bracken or bramble to their own devices, choking out delicate wild flowers."

The good news is that many animals, such as breeding birds, enjoyed an

unusually peaceful start to the season, while many more of us humans sought solace in nature to relieve the strain of lockdown. Lots of our nature reserves saw a dramatic increase in footfall as people made the most of their daily exercise.

As life begins to return to normal we look forward to welcoming back our much-missed volunteers and catching up on all of that essential work.

## HS2 proceeds

In April, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, the Government announced that the first phase of HS2 could proceed. The news once again shines a light on the devastating impact the works will have on our natural environment. We continue to urge the Government to rethink its approach. Keep up to date at [bbowt.org.uk/hs2](https://bbowt.org.uk/hs2)

## Virtual AGM

This year's AGM is on 10 October from 10.30am. Due to the current Covid-19 restrictions the event will be hosted online, with the Conference and Volunteer of the Year Awards that usually accompany the AGM held separately at a future date. Please refer to the leaflet that came with this magazine for details of how to attend the AGM virtually, visit [bbowt.org.uk/AGM2020](https://bbowt.org.uk/AGM2020) or call 01865 788303.

## Our newest meadow

BBOWT is delighted to announce the purchase of Arncott Meadows in Oxfordshire, a nine hectare hay meadow with a diverse range of rare wild flowers, such as dyer's greenweed and saw-wort. We would like to thank the following for their generous help buying the land: Banister Charitable Trust, Biffa Award, EBM Charitable Trust, The Bouttell Bequest, The Helen Roll Charitable Trust, The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment, and Roger and Jean Jefcote CBE DL.



ANDY COLLINS

## UK NEWS



UK UPDATE

## Leading the change

I was delighted to start in the role of Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trusts this spring (even if it was in rather odd circumstances given the Covid-19 lockdown).

I've long seen The Wildlife Trusts as the most powerful movement for nature in the UK. Made up of 46 individual Wildlife Trusts, ranging from those covering urban areas, to county Wildlife Trusts, groups of counties, the devolved nations and finally island Trusts — we are embedded into the heart of our communities.

Together, we care for over 2,300 nature reserves ranging from Camley Street Natural Park right by London's Kings Cross station, to the spectacular Skomer and Skokholm islands off the coast of Pembrokeshire. In total, we directly manage or provide management advice on 332,697 hectares (822,112 acres) of land for nature. We all play our part — but it's worth mentioning that this collective effort amounts to even more land cared for than by the National Trust!

But what matters to me most is that our federated structure means that the majority of this is close to where people live; over 60 per cent of the UK population live within three miles of a Wildlife Trust nature reserve. And it's clear that, during the Covid-19 lockdown, millions of people have come to a new realisation of just how important local nature is to them.

I sometimes wonder if, over the last 100 years or so, the nature conservation movement in the UK has focussed a

little too much on the identification, categorisation and conservation of rare species and habitats, and not enough on the abundance of nature everywhere, and the preservation and restoration of ecosystem processes.

Don't get me wrong; we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the conservation pioneers that identified the first nature reserves and protected these sites for future generations. But we all know that nature conservation is no longer enough; we now need to put nature into recovery.

Much as we like to imagine we live in a green and pleasant land, the truth is that the UK is currently one of the most nature depleted countries in the world.

I'm 48 years old and the science is clear; in my lifetime 41 per cent of wildlife species in the UK have suffered strong or moderate decreases in abundance.

Species that were once common have become rare and with that the role or function they are performing in our ecosystems has also declined.

We've all experienced it. As a five year old, if I left my bedroom light on at night with the window open it would be swarming with moths 30 minutes later. Now, I'd be lucky to see one. Similarly, when we went on family holidays and drove up the A1 for five hours, the windscreen would be covered in squashed insects by the time we arrived at our holiday destination. Now, there might be one or two.

At The Wildlife Trusts, we want to see 30 percent of our land and sea being managed for nature's recovery by 2030. That's the bare minimum needed to restore nature in abundance to the UK and to start getting our ecosystems working properly again; capturing carbon, pollinating crops, storing water, rejuvenating soils and cleaning our rivers.

We want to work with farmers and other land managers to create a Nature Recovery Network, using field margins, river valleys, hedgerows, roadside verges, railway cuttings and back gardens to protect, connect and restore nature across our countryside, and into our towns and cities.

And we want a comprehensive package of policy measures put in place to help this happen. That includes improvements needed to the Agriculture Bill, the Fisheries Bill and the Environment Bill (all of which are going through parliament in the next few weeks and months) but also better use of planning policy to make sure new developments help nature's recovery, rather than speed its decline.

Our vision is one where nature is in full, healthy abundance all around us; skies filled with birds, snowstorms of butterflies and moths, armies of invertebrates, vast expanses of wetland and wild landscapes, and seas teeming with life.

And our vision is also one where there's a positive relationship between humanity and nature, rather than constantly behaving as if we are almost enemies.

This won't happen overnight, but it could happen over the next decade if all of us, people, politicians and business leaders put our minds to it.

And if it does happen, it will be thanks — in a very large part — to your support as one of The Wildlife Trusts' 850,000 members. 🙌

**Craig Bennett**  
Chief Executive, The Wildlife Trusts  
[@craigbennett3](mailto:@craigbennett3)



INVESTORS IN WILDLIFE

## Berkshire Botanical invests in wildlife

BBOWT has signed an Investors in Wildlife partnership with a local artisan spirits maker. Berkshire Botanical is based around the stunning 9,000 acre Yattendon Estate in West

the beautiful area of Yattendon.

Berkshire Botanical Gin is handcrafted in small batches in 'Harry', the handsome pot which resides in the Royal Oak Public House in the heart of Yattendon.

The Investors in Wildlife initiative encourages businesses and organisations to actively support wildlife conservation, so it's wonderful to have received the support of Berkshire Botanical, thank you!

Indeed we are grateful to all our corporate members who support the future of wildlife, from long-time supporters like Anne Veck Hair to new members such as Hindsight Consultancy.



Berkshire. Its philosophy is to create enduring, sustainable botanical spirits and liqueurs using the inspiration of botanicals growing within



Thanks to you!

Your membership means we can continue to protect rare lowland heathland such as Wildmoor Heath, together with the fragile wildlife that depends on it.

Wildmoor Heath flushes pink and purple in late summer, with a sweet scent to match the visual splendour

## Find peace on a nature reserve

Nature is a healer; she soothes the soul and lifts the spirit. Find your solace on one of BBOWT's 85 wildlife-rich nature reserves

### 1 Wildmoor Heath

**Postcode** RG45 7PW

**Great for...** Unusual variety of habitats

**Best time to visit** All-year round

**Size** 91 hectares

**Map ref** SU 838 630

Late summer is when heather bursts into bloom, turning heathland into a rousing carpet of pinks and purples. Wildmoor Heath has all three of the most commonly occurring types: heather (ling), bell heather and cross-leaved heath. Together they form a vivid tapestry serving up a feast of nectar for insects like bumblebees and the rare silver-studded blue butterfly.

Like many species found here, silver-studded blues have benefited from careful management that uses a combination of grazing by cattle and clearing by hand to keep the heath free of invasive birch and scrub. Surveys confirm the silver-studded blue is making a comeback across the nature reserve

after a difficult time in the 2000s.

The heathland is an important habitat for many other animals too. Lucky visitors might happen across a common lizard or perhaps an adder taking advantage of a break in the clouds to sun itself. And then there are the incredible heathland birds!

Look out for the small, brown Dartford warbler, perched on top of isolated stands of gorse as it belts out its scratchy tunes. Stonechat consider gorse a prized perch too; a little smaller than a robin and with a paler, orange breast, their call is like two stones being struck together. Dartford warblers can often be seen following stonechat about.

Ground-nesting nightjars are almost impossible to spot, though you might hear the unmistakable 'churring' call of this master of camouflage if you head down at dusk. One tip to potentially – just maybe – catch a glimpse of this elusive bird is to flap a white handkerchief about in a bid to tempt the curious males out of their cover to investigate.

### 2 Wells Farm

**Postcode** OX44 7PP

**Great for...** Farmland birds

**Best time to visit** Spring to autumn

**Size** 64 hectares

**Map ref** SP 621 008

If you are unsure whether wildlife and farming can exist in harmony, pay Wells Farm a visit. This working farm grows arable crops like wheat and barley, while also playing host to numerous farmland birds, including corn bunting,

yellowhammer, skylark and grey partridge. Wide field margins and a grassy bank full of tufted grasses support a plethora of insects, spiders and small mammals that help to keep crop pests under control – naturally. A small brook between two ponds is where you'll find moisture-loving frogs, toads and dragonflies, while a recently planted hedgerow will grow on to offer valuable shelter to many of the farm's wild residents.

Wells Farm



### 3 Chinnor Hill

**Postcode** HP27 0NB

**Great for...** Awe-inspiring views

**Best time to visit** Summer and autumn

**Size** 27.5 hectares

**Map ref** SP 767 002

Need to press the reset button? This Chilterns escarpment reserve should do the trick, sending spirits soaring as high as the red kites and kestrels that wheel overhead. With far-reaching views over the Vale of Aylesbury, Chinnor Hill is a place of timeless beauty. The ancient Ridgeway passes through, and its flower-rich chalk grassland offers a glimpse of a once-common Chilterns scene. At this time of year the floral show is drawing to a close, but not without a rousing finale courtesy of the Chiltern gentian. The Chilterns are the last

#### Take a virtual stroll

Fancy a wander from the comfort of your armchair? We will soon be launching warden-led virtual tours of some of our most popular reserves and sharing them on our YouTube channel: [youtube.com/user/BBOWildlifeTrust](https://youtube.com/user/BBOWildlifeTrust)

Discover nature reserves on your doorstep at [bbowt.org.uk/reserves](https://bbowt.org.uk/reserves)





# 60 years and counting...

This year is BBOWT's diamond jubilee! Let's celebrate as we take a look back at some of the incredible achievements of the past six decades

The Trust was founded by a group of forward-thinking ecologists who could see the extent of harm being done to the local environment. Work got underway in 1960 and it wasn't long before we took on our first nature reserve, Hurley Chalk Pit. Since then the area of reserves in our care has increased steadily, and today we manage some of the last wildlife-rich gems found in our local area.

As well as protecting these special places, our work with children and the wider community has inspired countless thousands of people to discover the wildlife on their doorstep, while our partnership with landowners and farmers means a significant area of land beyond our reserves is now managed in step with nature. Meanwhile our tireless campaigning and lobbying continues to deliver benefits for local wildlife.

## 1959

BBOWT (then the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Naturalists' Trust, or BBONT) is founded on November 14 by local ecologists. Activity begins apace the following year.



## 1968

Aston Clinton Ragpits, a rubbish tip in a quarry, is saved to restore to chalk downland. By 2015 more than 24,000 flowering orchids are counted.

## 1977

Only six military orchids flower at Homefield Wood, but by 2016 more than 720 are counted.



## 1985

College Lake was a cement quarry when volunteers started a project to restore the site. It is now one of our most popular reserves, with a visitor centre and more than 1,000 wildlife species!



## 1992

We launch otter habitat restoration projects. Otters can now be spotted throughout the Thames Valley.



## 1998

BBOWT sets up the first Water Vole Recovery Project in Britain. Surveys confirm that local water vole populations continue to expand.

## 2010

Silver-studded blue butterflies breed again at Wildmoor Heath, thanks to volunteers who cut heather and clear birch in this rare habitat.



## 2015

It's a record year for snake's-head fritillaries at Oxford's Iffley Meadows. More than 85,000 are counted, up from just 500 when we took over management in 1983.



## 1960s

Generous donors help us buy Hurley Chalk Pit (1964), Chinnor Hill (1966) and Warburg Nature Reserve (1969), all important for chalk grassland flowers and butterflies.



## 1981

BBOWT buys Long Herdon meadow, the first of our 10 floodplain meadow reserves in the Upper Ray Valley.



## 1989

Rare Bechstein's bats now make their home in Finemere Wood, which was bought this year and transformed into a bat and butterfly haven.



## 1993

The Berkshire Heathland Project launches, restoring and recreating habitats at Inkpen Common, Decoy Heath and Wildmoor Heath.

## 2003

We buy Chimney Meadows, a 198 hectare arable farm, to convert to traditional hay meadows. Chimney expands in 2017 to include Duxford Old River, creating the first nature reserve to span the River Thames.



## 2014

Nine West Berkshire Council nature reserves, including Greenham and Crookham Commons and the Nature Discovery Centre transfer to BBOWT.



## 2020

BBOWT continues to work with other Wildlife Trusts to ensure nature's recovery, campaigning hard for improvements to the Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Bills, and promoting the benefits of a Nature Recovery Network to both people and wildlife.





# The next 30 years

Green, happy, healthy: Our vision sees Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire transformed for the benefit of nature – and people

If you think we've achieved a lot over the past 60 years, our ambitions for the next 30 are even greater!

Imagine it's 2050, and our local landscapes are made up of a rich patchwork of woodland, meadows and hedgerows, humming with bird and insect life. This is the vision BBOWT has for nature across our three counties.

At the heart of this transformation is a Nature Recovery Network. At its core will be nature's gems – our existing nature reserves and protected sites we are working hard to protect. From this core, nature will extend into every part of our towns, cities and countryside, giving nature the room it needs to sustain a healthy population of wildlife and people.

By 2050, important habitats and species, such as floodplain meadows, chalk grassland, hedgehogs, and curlew will be showing impressive population expansion and will be far more connected across the counties. Even our common species, like great tits and moorhens, will be thriving alongside booming insect populations, a sign that

natural ecosystems are functioning properly.

It's not only nature that will be thriving – people will be too. They will feel healthier and happier; there will be less stress and anxiety. The next generation will simply understand that the natural world is fundamental to our very existence; that we depend on it, and it depends on us.

Our proposal for a Nature Recovery Network will place wildlife in the best position to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. An ambitious Environment Act and Agriculture Bill will provide the legal foundation to develop a Nature Recovery Network nationwide, helping turn nature's recovery from aspiration to reality.

Given the urgency of climate change, we are already ramping up conservation activities from our nature reserves out into the wider countryside, looking at new ways of working with landowners to deliver nature-based solutions. Partnerships like this will help us restore nature at a landscape-scale, to help halt the loss of British wildlife while also tackling the climate crisis.

## BBOWT today

### Special places

We now manage 85 nature reserves, covering an area of 2,636 hectares. Beyond our reserves we work with farmers, landowners and other partners for the benefit of nature.



### People power

More than 1,800 volunteers and a team of dedicated staff work hard to protect local wildlife and champion nature's recovery in the wider landscape.



### Incredible you

Members like you help to support the Trust's invaluable work. There are 25,500 memberships in total; each one enables us to do that little bit more for wildlife.



Melissa Harrison

## Get creative with nature

When was the last time you made something for no reason at all, save curiosity and fun? Children, for the most part, play naturally and with no clear goal in sight, and do so especially easily in natural settings. Yet, as adults we can become results-driven: when we spend time doing something we assess its worth by what we achieved at the end of it, not what it felt like to do at the time. But one of the best ways of nurturing a deep, imaginative connection to nature is through creativity, and at its purest and most powerful, creativity is about play. Recording the hum of bees in your garden for an ambient track, photographing a year in the life of a street tree, keeping a nature diary, writing a seasonal haiku — engaging with the natural world to make something that didn't exist before can be a powerfully rewarding act.

The key is finding something we truly enjoy doing, whatever the outcome — rather than it being a skill we want to acquire, or an activity to excel at. A neighbour recently took a class called 'watercolour doodling'. The aim wasn't to create an accomplished picture, but to have fun playing with paint. It made me think of the pictures I drew as a child of things in my garden, before school taught me that 'good' art was detailed and representative, and anything more offbeat or expressive — more fun to create — wouldn't earn me a gold star.

When I was first finding my way as a novelist I found exploring London's parks and commons with a camera immensely important: unlike writing, nobody was ever going to mark my work, and it didn't matter whether I turned out to be a good photographer or not. I just

loved taking pictures of the plants and birds and insects that I saw, and by doing it week-in, week-out, as the seasons changed, my ability to notice wildlife of all kinds increased, the natural world seemed more and more detailed and fine-grained, and my connection to my nearby green spaces grew stronger and deeper, rewarding me in turn by bringing richness to my life. Now I write about nature for a living, but I still take a lot of pictures, and enjoy jotting down rough descriptions and even poetry that no-one will ever see.

Last year I had fun making cyanotypes using leaves and light-sensitive paper. A friend does a drawing a day — usually in her garden, but sometimes looking out of her window — giving herself just 10 minutes and not worrying about how polished the results are. Whatever draws you pleasurably into the natural world, slows down time and focuses your attention is worth pursuing. Young, old, or somewhere in between, playing creatively in and with nature is a truly life-affirming thing.



Discover more ways to connect with nature creatively. Visit [wildlifetrusts.org/nature-at-home](https://wildlifetrusts.org/nature-at-home)

### A LITTLE BIT WILD

The Yorkshire artist James Brunt arranges leaves, stones and other natural materials to create breath-taking patterns and shapes. The impermanence of this kind of natural art feels very liberating to make, and it's something anyone can have a go at.



Melissa Harrison is a nature writer and novelist, and editor of the anthologies *Spring*, *Summer*, *Autumn* and *Winter*, produced in support of The Wildlife Trusts.

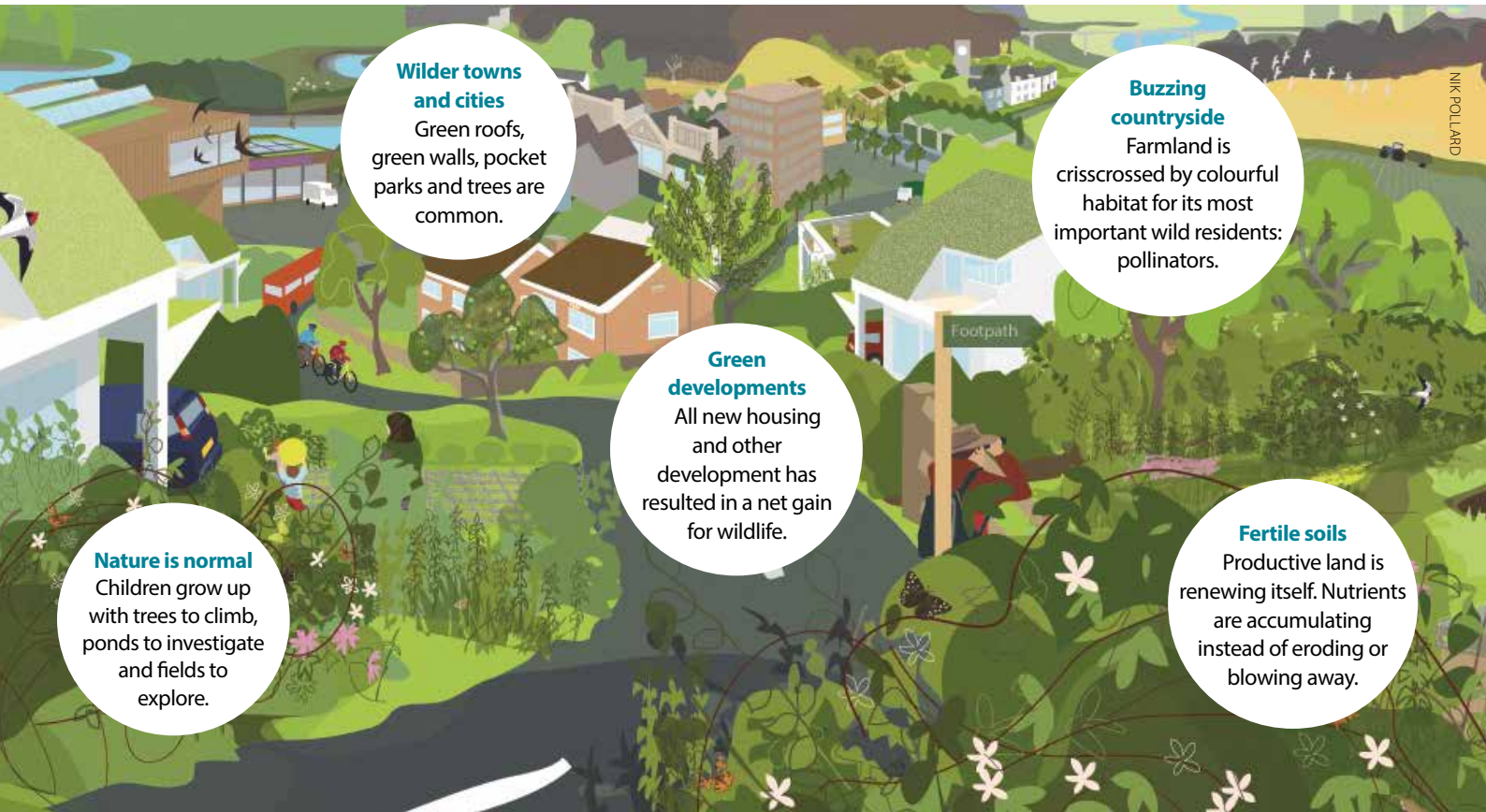


ILLUSTRATION BY ROBIN MACKENZIE



# Green shoots of recovery

ANDREW MARSHALL/GO WILD LANDSCAPES

The lockdown brought the beauty and benefits of nature into sharp focus. What's needed now is a green recovery that addresses both the climate and ecological emergencies, urges **Matthew Stanton**, Head of Planning, Policy and Advocacy.

Sites like Chimney Meadows show how we can practically address the climate and ecological emergencies

As the world emerges from the coronavirus crisis, one thing has become clear: we all rely on nature for our physical, mental and economic wellbeing. For too long we have taken it for granted, using its gifts while never giving back. Our one-way relationship with nature has caused the three biggest crises of our lives: coronavirus, climate change and a dramatic decline in nature.

But nature also has the answer.

Our recovery from the economic impact of the pandemic must redress this imbalance. Our recovery must be green. By investing in our natural world we can tackle climate change, restore biodiversity, reconnect people with nature and create new jobs. Nature-based solutions can take on all these challenges.

## Twin emergencies

Urgent action is required to halt climate change and avoid potentially irreversible environmental damage resulting from it. The United Nations says we could have just

10 years left to limit a climate catastrophe. Alongside this, wildlife continues to decline. The State of Nature 2019 report found that 15% of species are threatened with extinction in the UK. Some groups are faring worse than others. For example, 26% of our mammals are at a very real risk of extinction. Since the 1950s the number of hedgehogs has declined by 95%, while turtle doves have crashed by 98%, and even numbers of the common toad have fallen by 68%.

## The time to act is now.

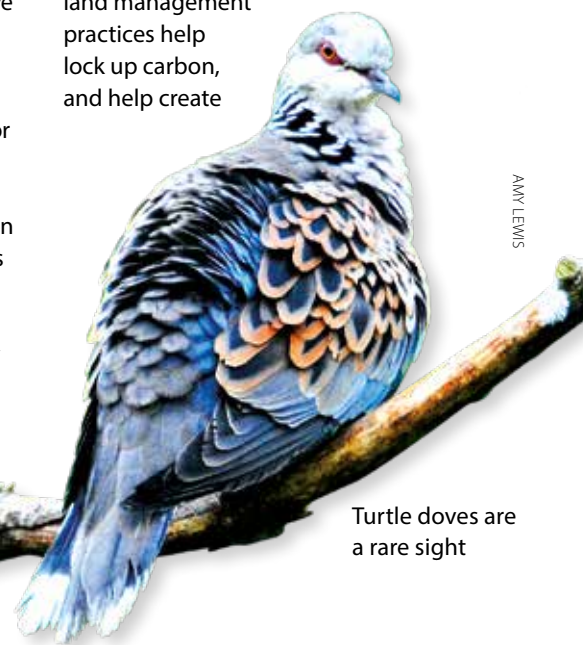
A healthy natural environment is essential for combating the climate crisis and restoring nature. For instance, healthy habitats can draw down and store vast amounts of carbon to tackle climate change and provide homes for wildlife to tackle the nature crisis. They also help society and nature cope with the climate change that's happening already, by providing important benefits such as flood mitigation, erosion control, improved health

and wellbeing, and resilient ecosystems.

The nature and climate emergency is a global challenge but there are local solutions, and everyone has their part to play.

## Our local response

At BBOWT we manage our nature reserves for wildlife and restore habitats that deliver multiple benefits to society. Our land management practices help lock up carbon, and help create



AMY LEWIS

Turtle doves are a rare sight

## Carbon capture

Natural solutions to locking up atmospheric carbon may be low tech, but are highly effective too.

**1,030m tonnes**

The amount of carbon locked up in UK woodlands.

Species-rich grassland stores **500%** more carbon than wheat monoculture.

Soils contain more carbon than is stored in plants and the atmosphere combined.



**37%**

Potential contribution of natural systems to CO2 reduction by 2030.

resilient ecosystems that help wildlife adapt to climate change. At Chimney Meadows we have converted arable land to wildflower-rich floodplain meadow, and this conversion has delivered four times as much value to the public than if it was a conventional farm. The benefits that Chimney Meadows now delivers include the locking up of carbon, flood, climate and water quality regulation, health and recreation benefits, and increased wild species diversity.

Sustainable farming can also play an important role in tackling the crises. More environmentally-friendly land management approaches, which will be rewarded under the new Environmental Land Management Scheme, will help secure more sustainable food production, restore nature, and lock up carbon across our local landscapes. At BBOWT we are working with farmers and landowners



ANDREW MARSHALL/GO WILD LANDSCAPES

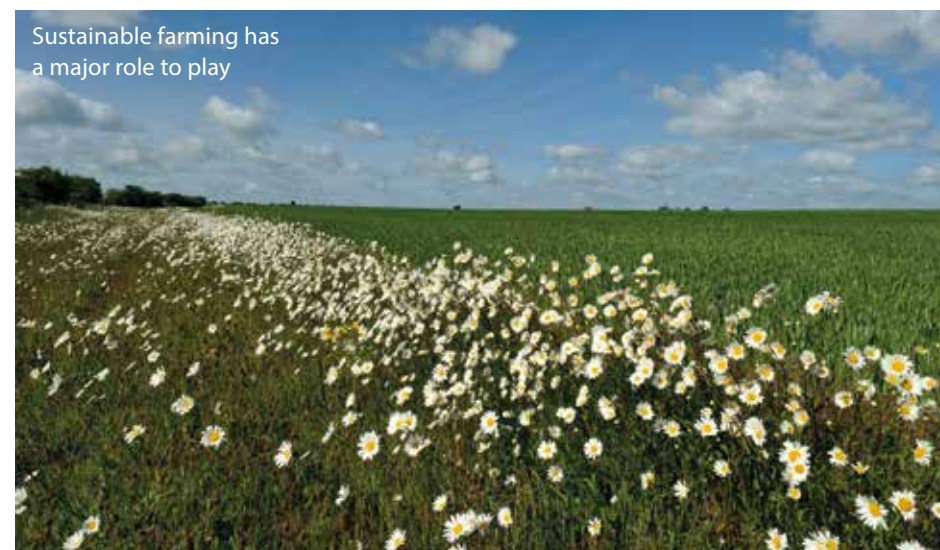
Nature hangs in the balance

to demonstrate how adjustments to land management approaches can help create measurable environmental improvements to support nature's recovery across agricultural landscapes.

## Nature on the doorstep

By increasing the area of land managed to tackle the nature and climate crises, we are

Sustainable farming has a major role to play



CHRIS GOMERSALL/2020VISION

## The bigger picture

A Nature Recovery Network will put nature at the heart of our farming and planning systems. This would help both wildlife and people to thrive, while also tackling climate change.

## Identify and protect

Two-thirds of nature-rich land lies outside of protected areas. To secure its future and nature's recovery we must identify, map and protect these places.

## Restore and expand

These local sites must then be restored (where necessary) as part of a national Nature Recovery Network that links up and expands areas of wildlife value.

## At land and sea

Farmers and other land managers need incentives to improve their land for nature and contribute to the network. A carefully considered network of Marine Protected Areas is also required.

also increasing access to nature in both rural and urban settings. The importance of having nature on our doorsteps has come into sharp focus during the lockdown. We have been championing Nature Recovery Networks which would direct where investment in our natural world would be best targeted to generate benefits for wildlife, join up precious habitats and bring people closer to nature.

As a member you are actively supporting all of this incredibly valuable work. You should feel proud about being part of the solution

**"A healthy natural environment is essential for combating the climate crisis and restoring nature."**

to this complex problem. By fighting tooth and nail for nature's recovery we are also contributing, in our own way, to the very survival of life as we know it. 🌱



# Hidden meadows

Marine biologist **Nia Hâf Jones** introduces a hidden world beneath the waves

I float weightlessly on the surface, swaying back and forth as the gentle waves carry me over the meadow. Fish dart in and out and I notice snakelocks anemones clinging to the thin, bright green leaves, the seagrass seemingly unaffected by their weight. I'm enthralled and my focus softens — there's something auroral in the way the light dances and the seagrass sways. It occurs to me that I had never really appreciated how lucky I was to live so close to one of the UK's greatest habitats.

**Underwater meadows**  
Globally, there are around 60 species of seagrass, though only four are native to the UK and only two of those are considered 'true'

There's something auroral in the way the light dances and the seagrass sways.

seagrasses. These incredible species are the only flowering plants in the UK that can live and pollinate in seawater. They have long, green, ribbon-shaped leaves and can grow in small discrete patches or vast beds spanning hectares. Like other plants, they flower, develop fruit, produce seeds and are anchored by a network of interwoven roots that extract nutrients from the sediment. These traits distinguish them from seaweeds, which are often mistaken for plants, but do not have roots, and instead anchor using a holdfast and take nutrients directly from the water.

For seagrasses to thrive, they need lots of light and shelter from waves and currents. When conditions are right, the beds they form create a fantastic habitat for a host of wildlife. They stabilise and oxygenate the sediment, slowing down water flow and making the area

more hospitable for other species. The leaves themselves provide a surface for marine life to live on, such as anemones, hydroids, sea-squirts, sea mats and brown, red and coralline algae. Some of the rarer 'hangers-on' include the weird and wonderful stalked jellyfish with their alien-like appearance.

Exploring a seagrass bed, you might spot two of the UK's rarest and much loved species — the seahorses. Both short-snouted and long-snouted seahorses are associated with seagrass, where they cling on to the leaves with their prehensile tail to stop themselves from being swept away by the tide. Long-snouted seahorses, also known as spiny seahorses, live amongst the seagrasses, whereas short-snouted seahorses prefer sandy and rocky areas nearby.

Seagrass also provides the perfect nursery for many fish, like pollack, cod, and dab, thanks to the high level of shelter provided by the seagrass itself and an abundance of food available for young fish to eat. Other species, like lobsters, have also been shown to shelter in the sediment during their early life stages and you don't have to look for long to see signs of burrowing creatures, such as lugworm or sea potato. Hermit crabs, anemones, pipefish, shore crabs, cuttlefish and all sorts of sea-snails also call

this diverse habitat home.

It's easy to see why these rich habitats are sometimes referred to as underwater meadows. Just like their more familiar, terrestrial namesakes, healthy seagrass meadows are a wonderful place to enjoy the diversity of wildlife we have in the UK.

**The canary of the sea**  
Naturally, the extent and distribution of seagrass changes with seasonal and annual cycles. Physical disturbance in the form of the occasional storm may help keep it healthy and productive, but persistent disturbance and added human pressures have taken their toll. In the 1930s a significant proportion of seagrass in the UK died from a wasting disease, which attacks the leaves and prevents photosynthesis, killing the plant. With added human impact it is estimated that we have lost 92% of our seagrass in the last century. Researchers have dubbed seagrass beds the canaries of the sea — they reflect the general health of our oceans and human impact is becoming increasingly clear.



Seagrass meadows are important nurseries for young fish, like these juvenile cuckoo wrasse.



Seagrass meadows are important habitats for many of our marine species, including spiny seahorses.



## In numbers

Over  
**40 times**

more species can be found within a seagrass meadow than on the bare sand next to it.

Estimates show that one hectare of healthy seagrass can support up to

**80,000**

fish and

**100,000,000**  
invertebrates

Globally, even though seagrass occupies only 0.1% of the seafloor, it accounts for between

**10-18%**  
of its annual carbon storage.

Snakelocks anemones are one of the many species that can be found living on seagrass leaves.

The threats are varied. Nutrient run-off is a double-whammy: whilst toxic to seagrass it also stimulates growth in algae which competes with the seagrass for space and light. Invasive alien species also compete with seagrass and, in many places, it's a competition they're winning. Coastal development creates sediment that smothers the beds and damage by anchor chains, moorings, propellers and launching vehicles is also evident where boating activity is prevalent. Even trampling by coast users can be an issue at low tide.

### Blue carbon

By losing seagrass we also lose the diversity of species that live there. But there's even more at stake. Seagrass beds provide a whole host of essential ecosystem services. They filter pollutants, cycle nutrients, stabilise sediments and reduce coastal erosion. They also absorb huge amounts of carbon and because of this are increasingly recognised in the attempt to tackle the climate crisis and are considered an important natural solution. Seagrass beds sequester carbon — known as 'blue carbon' — in two ways: through photosynthesis and by trapping and stabilising particles from the water column. If undisturbed, carbon can be locked into seagrass sediments for millennia. It is therefore incredibly important that this

Hermit crabs, lobsters, shore crabs and other crustaceans call seagrass meadows home.

The colour-changing little cuttlefish can sometimes be found in seagrass.

special habitat is protected.

Luckily seagrass is resilient and given the chance can recover. Whilst habitat management is not easy in the sea it is possible! Seagrass restoration projects are being piloted in the UK, with the help of The Wildlife Trusts. Seeds are being collected from various sites and cultivated, ready for replanting to create new meadows. Other work includes looking at mooring systems that reduce the physical impact of boating and educating people around the importance of seagrass. Whilst these meadows may remain unseen by many, they have a crucial role in bringing about nature's recovery in the sea. Fortunately, they feature in a number of our Marine Protected Areas, but designation is just the first step — to ensure their long-term future active management is essential before they lose the capacity to recover altogether. 🍀



Find out more about our wonderful seagrass habitats in the UK and the projects to save them at [wildlifetrusts.org/seagrass](http://wildlifetrusts.org/seagrass)

# Get your garden peat free

From making our own compost to thinking before we buy, **Kate Bradbury** reveals how we can help protect peatlands, starting from our gardens.

## Tree choice

Leaves of ash, beech, birch, cherry, elm, hornbeam, lime, oak, poplar and willow will break down and be ready to use in a year.

Peat forms when dead vegetation falls into waterlogged soil and doesn't fully rot away. It's found in wetland habitats, such as peat bogs and moors, and grows at a rate of just 1mm per year. These peatlands are incredibly diverse habitats, home to rare bog plants and mosses, invertebrates like dragonflies and beetles, and birds such as golden plovers and curlews. Peatlands store masses of carbon; over three billion tonnes are stored in British peatbogs alone.

Tragically, despite its remarkable value, peat is widely used as an ingredient in potting composts. This is dug out of peat bogs in the UK, Ireland and eastern Europe, damaging these wild habitats while releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

You can buy peat-free compost but if your local garden centre doesn't sell it, some suppliers offer a discount for bulk orders – why not group together and save money? However you do it, always make sure you buy peat-free. Peat-based materials simply aren't worth losing our wildlife, and our planet over. 🌱

## Leaf mould

Leaf mould is an exceptional material, made from broken down leaves. The easiest way to make it is to fill bin bags with wet autumn leaves, stab a few holes into the bag and leave behind your shed.

## Compost heap

Start a compost heap with a mix of leafy materials, food waste, kitchen scraps and woody material such as twigs and cardboard. Avoid adding large amounts of lawnmower clippings, which can make the compost sludgy.

## Wild haven

Rotting waste is a buffet for many invertebrates, which themselves attract predators like beetles, newts and shrews. Grass snakes lay eggs in compost heaps and toads use them to hibernate.

## Leaf piles

A leaf pile can shelter moths over winter and provide nesting material for hedgehogs in summer.

## Peat-free potting mix

Make your own using equal parts soil, leaf mould and sieved garden compost. For seed-sowing mixes use equal parts soil, leaf mould and horticultural sand.

ILLUSTRATION: HANNAH BAILEY



# Thank you!

The past few months have been challenging and at times bewildering. During this period of upheaval we have continued to protect nature and those special wild places we cherish, so it's here for when you need it. We would like to thank all of our members, volunteers and supporters for their ongoing commitment to local wildlife. Nature needs us more than ever before and your support means we can continue to do what we do.



Donating to BBOWT is easier than ever and every penny helps us do more to protect local wildlife. Visit [bbowt.org.uk/donate](https://bbowt.org.uk/donate) or call **01865 788300**. You can also donate by text message – and it couldn't be easier. Simply text **WILD 5** to **70460** (you will be charged £5 plus one standard rate message and opt in to future SMS marketing from us). If you would like to give more, then substitute 5 for any whole amount up to 20. To opt out of SMS marketing, text **WILDNOINFO** followed by your donation amount, e.g. **WILDNOINFO 5**.