

# Wild

Summer 2021

Berkshire,  
Buckinghamshire  
& Oxfordshire

NATURAL REMEDIES

## Climate heroes

How floodplain meadows  
can help solve the  
climate crisis



### RAISE YOUR VOICE

Actor Cel Spellman on  
why we should all be  
champions for nature

### NIGHT RIDERS

Swoop into the  
shadowy world of bats

Berkshire  
Buckinghamshire  
Oxfordshire





# Welcome

## Are things looking up?



How wonderful to be getting back to a new normal as restrictions finally ease. Like many of you, I've drawn energy from spending more time closer to nature and, more recently, visiting nature reserves.

Work has now resumed right across our reserves, visitor centres are open, community engagement projects are underway and we're welcoming increasing numbers of children back to our education centres.

Despite the difficulties of the past year we've continued to create positive gains for wildlife, both on the ground and against a challenging political headwind! Through consistent pressure wins have been made on the Environment Bill, large infrastructure projects like HS2 must now achieve a net gain for biodiversity, and there's a duty on local authorities to produce Nature Recovery Strategies.

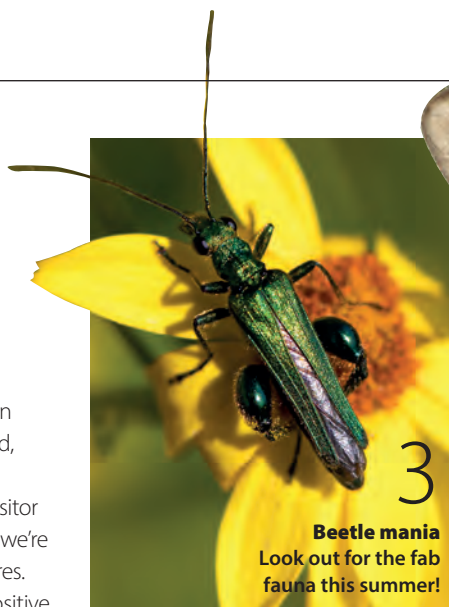
In the run up to the COP26 summit this autumn, Natural England has had its annual budget doubled. Meanwhile Defra has announced a plethora of new measures to achieve a 'net-positive impact for nature', halting further declines, investing in peat and woodland restoration, while delivering Nature Recovery Networks across England. Are things looking up?

As government continues to talk of 'Building Back Better' from the pandemic, there remain concerns that things don't quite add up. To truly build back better we must put nature at the heart of everything we do, from development to food production to the way we think about our relationship with the planet. It is essential for wildlife – and for us – because the climate and nature emergencies are part and parcel of the same thing.

The solutions are incredibly cost-effective and 'easy'; we just need to let nature do its thing! BBOWT's work as part of the Floodplain Meadows Partnership is one example of how we can play our part, with what promise to be astonishing results (see page 10).

In fact, we are best placed locally to push this exciting agenda forward. You are playing your part too, because as a member you are lending your voice, a voice that nature needs right now.

Estelle Bailey, Chief Executive



3

**Beetle mania**  
Look out for the fab fauna this summer!



8

**Precious places**  
Plan a wild day out



**Meadows for the climate**  
Our floodplain meadows plan

10

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

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

**Contact** 01865 775476, [info@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:info@bbowt.org.uk)

**Membership** 01865 788300,  
[membership@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:membership@bbowt.org.uk)

**Address** The Lodge, 1 Armstrong Road,  
Littlemore, Oxford OX4 4XT

**Website** [www.bbowt.org.uk](http://www.bbowt.org.uk)

**President** Steve Backshall

**Chair** Joanna Davidson

**Chief Executive** Estelle Bailey

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.

*Wild Berks, Bucks & Oxon brought to you by*

**Editor** Ben Vanheems

**UK Consultant Editor** Tom Hibbert

**UK Consultant Designer** Ben Cook

**Design** Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Design Studio

**Print** KKN Print

**Cover** Mark Hamblin/2020VISION

A large-print version of *Wild Berks, Bucks & Oxon* (text only) is available on request. Call 01865 775476 or email [info@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:info@bbowt.org.uk)

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# Your wild summer

AMY LEWIS

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

## Bring back beetles

As a member you are already helping protect beetles. See what else you can do to Bring Back Beetles by downloading your free guide at [wildaboutgardens.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardens.org.uk)

### SUMMER SPECTACLE

## Beautiful beetles

Did you know that beetles make up a third of all known species? The UK has its fair share, with more than 4,000, each with its own niche. Beetles are indispensable: They pollinate plants, keep a check on garden pests like slugs, offer a meal for animals higher up the food chain, and even recycle nutrients back into the soil. Summer is the best time to hunt them out. Peer into ponds for whirligigs and water boatman, search around garden plants for colourful favourites such as ladybirds and the metallic-green thick-legged flower beetle, or scour the undergrowth for ground-dwellers like the devil's coach horse.

### SEE THEM THIS SUMMER

- **CS Lewis Nature Reserve** The pond, a flooded Victorian clay pit, is prime territory for water beetles.
- **Moor Copse** Damp, rotting wood in Hogmoor Copse is the perfect breeding ground for many different beetles.
- **Grangelands & The Rifle Range** Visit the grasslands on a warm summer's evening to admire the glow-worms.

Many beetles, like the red lily beetle have colourful or patterned shells (actually hardened front wings). This serves as a warning to would-be predators that they aren't worth eating because they are either poisonous, venomous or simply taste bad – a phenomenon called aposematism.



# One step ahead

Savour the summer but help wildlife prepare for chillier times

## Hunker down

Summertime and the living is easy, although – sorry to say – colder weather looms ahead! By late summer the frantic scramble to prepare for winter has already begun. It's time for many animals to fatten up and prepare for the leaner times ahead.

Hibernating animals such as hedgehogs, toads, bats and grass snakes slow their bodies to a crawl as they lower their heart rate, breathing and even their body temperature (a hedgehog's will plummet from 35°C to a decidedly cool 10°C!). It's all in the name of saving precious energy so they can sit out the cold without having to resort to searching for food that is thin on the ground.

Some insects, including bumblebees, ladybirds and many butterflies, undergo a form of dormancy called diapause, where development is put on hold for the winter. To help survive freezing temperatures these

insects create their own natural antifreeze!

You can help wildlife by making hibernacula for animals and bugs to overwinter in. Readymade safe and cosy boltholes mean one less job for nature's hardy heroes to rush and complete before winter arrives.

### SEEK IDEAS THIS SUMMER

➤ **College Lake** Explore the wildlife garden at College Lake for plenty of ideas of how to help nature in your own garden.

➤ **Warburg Nature Reserve** Bird spot by the pond, check out the garden then pop into the interpretation centre for more wildlife-friendly top tips.



Make your own hedgehog home, log shelter or bee hotel: [bbowt.org.uk/actions](http://bbowt.org.uk/actions)



*Did you know?*  
Despite their autumnal seek-and-hide dash for nuts, squirrels don't hibernate. All they are doing is building up their winter stores.

## Starry nights

Clear summer evenings invite us to gaze skyward. As well as bats swooping out to hunt and birds circling home to roost, there's the majesty of the star-filled sky above. The Perseid meteor shower reaches a peak on the night of the 12th August with around 150 bright, fast meteors per hour. Head somewhere dark, allow your eyes plenty of time to adjust and witness nature's own firework display.



### Fascinating fungi

Cool, damp autumns signal flushes of fungi in woodlands and grasslands. Set off on a fascinating fungal foray and prepare to be amazed!

#### Common puffball

Look for this puffball in coniferous woodland. They release a cloud of spores when touched or knocked by raindrops.



#### Amethyst deceiver

This rather stunning purple fungus is widely seen in woodlands, shyly peeking out from the leaf litter.



#### Fly agaric

The instantly recognisable fungus of childhood fairy tales. Find the highly poisonous toadstools close to birch trees.



### LEAVE THIS

High winds mean windfall apples, plums and other fallen fruits. Don't be in a hurry to clear bruised fruits to the compost heap. Leave some where they drop for the birds to feast on.

### SEE THIS

Head to a pond, river or lake to catch a glimpse of dragonflies. Some can fly at up to 30mph so you'll need to keep your eye out! See what's what at [bbowt.org.uk/dragonflies](http://bbowt.org.uk/dragonflies)





## Cel Spellman

  @celspellman

## Raise your voice



I'm proud to be part of an organisation with a rich history of driving change. As a supporter of The Wildlife Trusts, I know I'm part of a community that stands up and uses its collective voice for nature. Together, we've achieved huge and crucial changes, from reintroducing wildlife like the beaver, to protecting our seas — a huge carbon store — with the Marine Act. All of this plays a massive part in turning the tide against nature's loss and climate change and would not have been possible without people coming together and speaking up.

However, a question that often seems to present itself is, 'Does protesting actually work?'. For me, the answer is simple — a resounding yes! But there are numerous ways to do this. We tend to think of protests as big rallies and marches, which is often the case and can absolutely work. I was privileged to be involved with the Time is Now march in 2019 for urgent climate change action; the hope and positivity in the air was palpable. It's moments like these that help you feel like you're not alone and that change can and will come.

The School Climate Strikes also provide a shining example. Young people making their voices, thoughts and feelings clear. For me, these strikes have been one of the biggest reasons we've seen a shift in mindset and conversation around climate over the last few years. Young people's voices are some of the most powerful and they never cease to blow me away with how aware they are, and the absolute drive they have for making the world a better, fairer, greener place.



But marches aren't the only way to make our voices heard. Signing petitions, sharing something we see online, having those difficult, important conversations with friends, or writing to our MP or a business can also have a huge impact. 10-year-old Skye from Gwynedd is a huge inspiration to me; she campaigned for magazines to stop giving away disposable plastic toys. In response, Waitrose said they'll no longer sell children's magazines containing disposable plastic toys, a move single-handedly inspired by Skye, and I've no doubt other businesses will follow suit. That is the power of our voice.

We can also protest with our wallets. Money talks, and by choosing where we spend ours, who we invest in, who we bank with, we can express our beliefs and support businesses or individuals that share them.

It's about putting pressure on those that need the pressure applying. However this is done, you really can make a difference for the environment, for nature, for our wonderful wildlife and in turn, for ourselves and our future. I've no doubt that together we can and will change the world.

To quote Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*, 'You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure...'



**To tackle the climate and nature emergency we face, our natural world needs advocates on its side. Find out about the big issues at [wildlifetrusts.org/emergency](https://wildlifetrusts.org/emergency)**

### SHOUT FOR WILDLIFE

Join over 100,000 people speaking up with The Wildlife Trusts on everything from better laws for wildlife to banning the sale of peat compost. Together our voices can make a difference. You can sign up to our campaigns mailing list to be the first to hear when new campaigns are launching so that you can take your stand for nature's recovery. To register, visit **[wildlifetrusts.org/campaigns](https://wildlifetrusts.org/campaigns)**



**Cel Spellman** is an actor and presenter, an ambassador for The Wildlife Trusts, and an ardent advocate for nature, wildlife and the need to address the climate crisis.



# WILD NEWS

All the latest local and national news from The Wildlife Trusts

Turn your  
inbox wild!

Sign up to our  
e-newsletter at [bbowt.  
org.uk/newsletter](https://bbowt.org.uk/newsletter) for  
all the latest news and  
updates.

## HOT TOPIC

# Badger culling to continue

ANDREW PARKINSON

BBOWT is devastated to learn that badger culling is set to continue till at least 2026, putting 130,000 badgers at risk of being shot. The announcement follows a public consultation that attracted more than 39,000 respondents, with 36,958 going on to email their MP to urge an immediate stop to the issuing of cull licences.

The Government's failure to listen to the public is desperately sad. Should the cull continue, we will have lost 300,000 badgers

out of a total of 485,000, or more than 60% of England's population. Around a quarter of all Europe's badgers are found in the UK.

We of course recognise bovine TB causes hardship among farmers, but there are more effective ways to halt its spread, including controls on cattle movement and widespread inoculation of badgers, through initiatives such as our own badger vaccination project. [bbowt.org.uk/badger-vaccination-project](https://bbowt.org.uk/badger-vaccination-project)



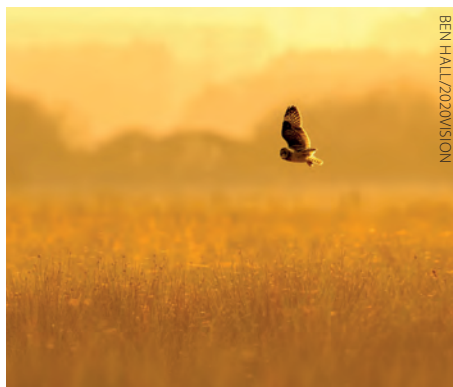
## Road blocked

Back in spring Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced the cancellation of the OxCam Expressway, a major dual carriageway that threatened scores of precious wildlife habitats. While we welcome this decision, we must now turn our attention to other threats in our area, such as plans for 'improvements' to the A34 west of Oxford.

BBOWT opposed the so-called Expressway from the start, taking our legal battle to the High Court. Despite the cancellation, it is clear that huge development is still planned for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc and this must put nature first.

Plans for the Expressway should never have got as far as they did and lessons must be learnt so the mistakes in failing to properly

consider its environmental impacts up front are not repeated. We cannot afford for the environment to play second fiddle to the economy any longer.



BEN HALL/2020VISION

## Can you help us?

We are incredibly excited to have the chance to buy Ludgershall Meadows, 31 hectares of wildflower meadows and hedges that connect to our existing Upper Ray Meadows. Acquiring these meadows will allow us to improve conditions for wildlife, so it can move freely between sites, but first we need your help! Turn to the back page to learn how.



COLIN WILLIAMS

## A breeding first!

In other news for the Upper Ray Meadows, redshank have bred at Gallows Bridge Farm for the first time since we bought the site. Protection from ground predators thanks to an electric fence, together with this year's nesting conditions (wetter meadows and the ponds mostly full of water) appear to have been ideal.



PETER CAIRNS/2020VISION

## Wild at heart

Well done to all who took part in this June's 30 Days Wild, where participants are challenged to do one wild thing a day throughout that month. More than 4,000 of you signed up through our website, including 675 schools, with Random Acts of Wildness including everything from feeding birds to sleeping out under the stars.



NICK UPTON



## UK UPDATE

### Flying start to 30 by 30

We've already raised almost £8 million towards our 30 by 30 ambition to kickstart nature's recovery across 30% of our land and seas by 2030. These vital funds will support projects to make new homes for wildlife, join up wild places and promote natural solutions to the climate crisis.

This spring, we unveiled ten new projects that will help nature fight back. The new projects include reviving ice-age ponds in Norfolk, transforming a 42-acre former Carlisle golf course into an urban bee and butterfly oasis, and quadrupling a Wiltshire nature reserve to help the rare marsh



fritillary butterfly thrive.

Of the £8 million total raised so far, over £900,000 has been given by members of the public. Thank you to everyone who has already supported our campaign to bring nature back.



Find out more and support the campaign at [wildlifetrusts.org/](https://wildlifetrusts.org/)

30-30-30

## UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts are helping wildlife across the UK



### 1 Help for kelp

A new byelaw now makes it illegal to trawl with bottom-towed fishing gear within an area off the Sussex coast. This landmark decision will give Sussex's important kelp forests the chance to recover, providing a home for a wide range of wildlife. Find out more at [wtru.st/help-kelp](https://wtru.st/help-kelp)

### 2 Fishing friends

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust is working with anglers in the Colne Valley to improve wetlands for wildlife, including the rare water vole. Fisheries look after many lakes and rivers, and by offering training and support, the Wildlife Trust and their partner, the Colne Valley Fisheries Consultative, are helping them further enhance these habitats for wildlife as well as people. For more info go to [wtru.st/hmwt-angling](https://wtru.st/hmwt-angling)



### 3 Seagrass saviours

A new partnership launched by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust aims to restore the Solent's seagrass beds. As well as providing a home for wildlife, seagrass protects coasts from erosion and absorbs carbon up to 35 times faster than tropical rainforests. See more at [wtru.st/solent-seagrass](https://wtru.st/solent-seagrass)

### Promise for peat

The Government has announced plans to phase out the use of peat in horticulture, including a consultation on banning the sale of peat and peat-containing products in the amateur sector by the end of this Parliament.

Ten years ago, the Government set a voluntary target for the horticulture sector to end sales to gardeners by 2020. This deadline was missed, and a

recent Wildlife Trust survey revealed that only one of 20 leading garden retailers contacted planned to eliminate peat from its shelves this year. Whilst the Government's announcement is welcome news, it must be backed by action and lead to a ban of peat sales.

See the announcement in full at [wtru.st/gov-speech](https://wtru.st/gov-speech)

Peat extraction is devastating peatlands across the world, yet many retailers are continuing to sell peat-based products





Thanks  
to you!

Your membership gives  
us the resources we need  
to protect wild places  
like Finemere Wood for  
generations to come.

Take a stroll in an  
ancient hunting forest

# Prepare to be awestruck!

Nature is full of surprises, joyful moments and wonderment. Enjoy a day out on one of BBOWT's 86 nature reserves and feel truly inspired this summer

## 1 Finemere Wood

**Postcode** HP22 4DE

**Great for...** Magnificent woodland

**Best time to visit** All year round

**Size** 77 hectares

**Map ref** SP 721 215

Centuries ago kings and queens thundered through here on horseback on the hunt for wild boar and deer. Once part of the Royal Forest of Bernwood, this ancient woodland still retains a sense of wild promise, though today's quarry are the many birds, bats and butterflies that sing, swoop and flutter, and the hunters come in peace.

There's a lot for wildlife lovers to seek out in this patchwork of broadleaved woodland, coppice and scrub, intersected by paths and wide woodland rides. In summer wild flowers such as willowherb and hairy St John's-wort catch the light that filters through the coppiced areas. Coppicing – when tree stems are regularly cut down close to the ground to stimulate strong, straight

wood traditionally used for tools, fire and furniture – has been practised for centuries at Finemere Wood. The brighter conditions created also encourage a richer woodland flora, with around 200 species of flowers recorded in this area.

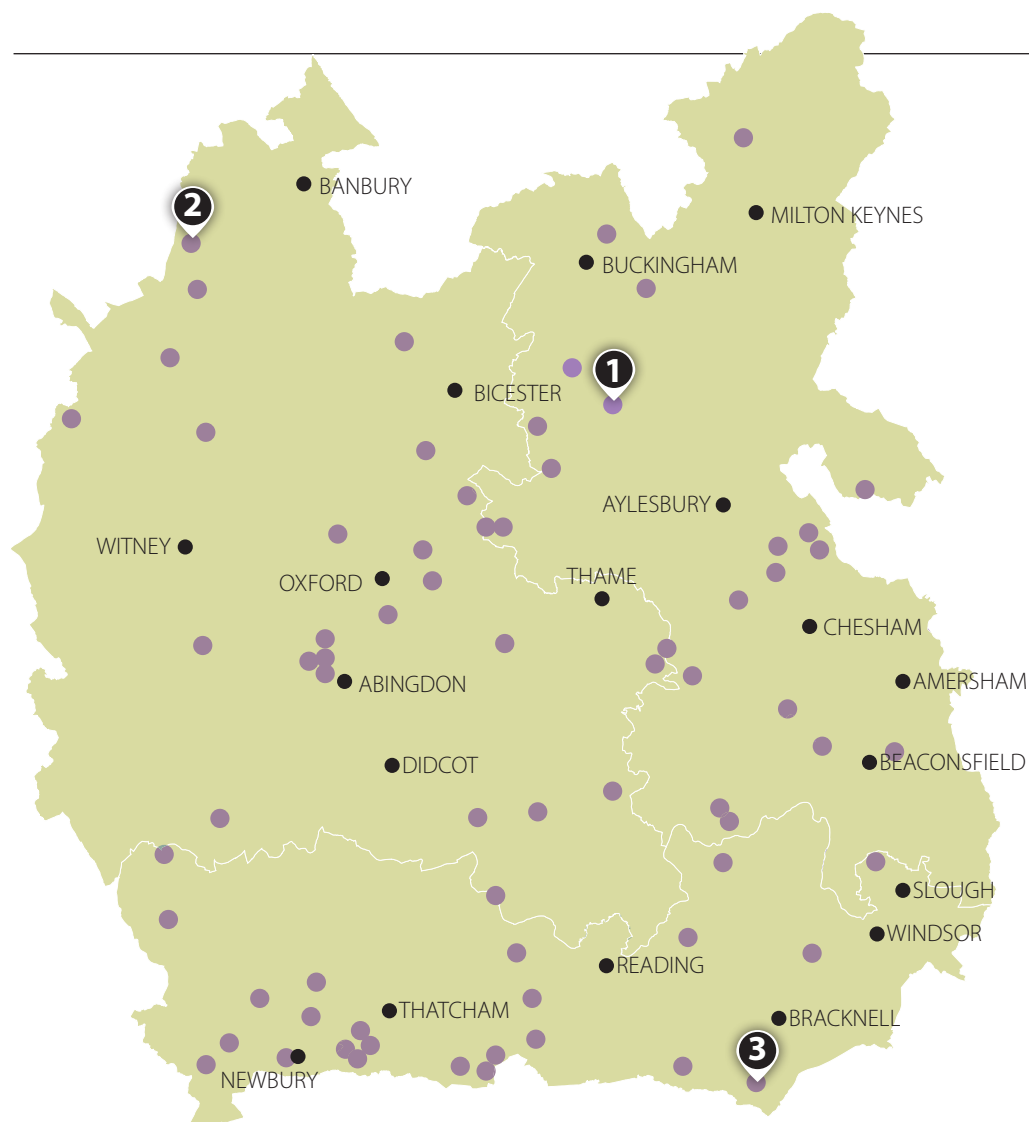
The woods ring out with the calls of many birds: migrant warblers, song thrushes, bullfinches, goldcrests high up in the canopy, and scouring the creviced bark for something to eat, treecreepers, nuthatches and woodpeckers. In contrast to the relative bright of the copses, some areas are left deliberately dense and shady for the incredibly rare Bechstein's bat, which roosts in these and nearby woodlands.

Stroll through the main ride in July or August and you might happen across a purple emperor butterfly. The males have a magnificent blue sheen to their upper wings and will vigorously defend their territory from other butterflies, earning them the nickname 'His Majesty' among butterfly enthusiasts – a fitting moniker for this woodland that still holds an unmistakable regal splendour.

CHRIS DAMANT







**Remember to take only photos and leave only footprints – on the paths! Follow the WALK code:**

**W**atch where you walk,  
**A**bide by the rules of the site,  
**L**eave the site as you found it,  
**K**eep to the paths



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

## 2 Hook Norton Cutting

**Postcode** OX15 5JR

**Great for...** Geological interest

**Best time to visit** Winter to summer

**Size** 8 hectares

**Map ref** SP 360 323

Love your lichen? Mad for moss? The retaining walls of this old railway cutting are full of them! This former Great Western Railway track is also of special geological interest, with exposed



Jurassic oolite limestones containing numerous fossils, now easier to admire thanks to recent scrub clearance. Birds such as woodpeckers and warblers make their home in the more wooded northern section, while the sunny limestone grassland of the southern section is brimming with wild flowers like woolly thistle, wild carrot and fairy flax.



Woolly thistle

## 3 Wildmoor Heath

**Postcode** RG45 7PW

**Great for...** Rare heathland

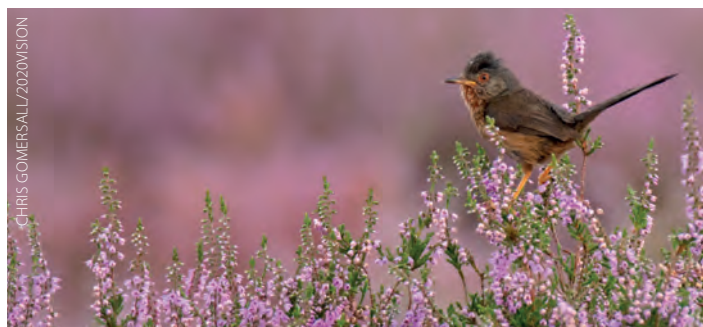
**Best time to visit** All year round

**Size** 91 hectares

**Map ref** SU 838 630

Wildmoor Heath bursts into flower in late summer, flushing the landscape with a carpet of pinks and purples. The swathes of heather serve up a feast for insects like bumblebees and butterflies. On a visit you might

happen across a common lizard or perhaps an adder sunning itself amongst the heather and bracken. And look out for the Dartford warbler with its beady red eye, perched on top of isolated stands of gorse as it belts out its scratchy tunes. Wetter areas are home to rare plants like the carnivorous round-leaved sundew, which feeds on small insects trapped by the sticky hairs on its leaves.





# Meadows for the climate

Trees are an important tool in our fight against climate change, but floodplain meadows like those along the Thames have a role to play too. Now an exciting new project to study and restore these precious meadows aims to produce conclusive evidence of just how effective they are at locking away carbon

A floodplain meadow in summer is like a vision of old England – tall grasses ripple in the gentle breeze, while swathes of delicate flowers are alive with the sounds of busy insects. In the distance a curlew calls, a tractor hums and a water vole plops into the river.

It's a classic rural scene, but what lies beneath is even older and just as precious. For hundreds of years the soil has been quietly capturing carbon and locking it away. Floodplain meadows are one of nature's original climate heroes.

## Carbon sinks

Now thanks to a generous grant from Ecover to restore and study floodplain meadows, BBOWT is joining forces with the 'Meadows for the Climate' partnership to prove that planting millions of trees is not the only nature-based solution to climate change. Together with The Open University's Floodplain Meadows Partnership and Long Mead's Thames Valley Wildflower Meadow Restoration Project, BBOWT plans to highlight the vital role restored floodplain meadows can play in locking away, or sequestering, carbon.

The work will involve studying floodplain meadows along the banks of the River Thames in Oxfordshire over the next three years. Soil samples will be collected from key meadow sites in the project area, which will be analysed to build a picture of how carbon stores change over time and across meadows of different stages of restoration. Head of Ecology, Debbie Lewis, will be contributing to the partnership by carrying out some of the soil sampling to calculate the amount of carbon captured on the meadows and



Devil's-bit scabious and great burnet at Oxey Mead, a fine example of floodplain meadow

neighbouring agricultural land.

"While it's well known that trees soak up carbon, we plan to demonstrate that floodplain meadows can be just as effective and reliable in sequestering carbon, and that they should be recognised as being as important as trees and peat as a nature-based solution to climate change. Nature has the solutions and this project enables us to show that locally on the banks of the River Thames, which is really exciting," says Debbie.

The project beat more than 770 entries from across Europe to win one of three Ecover 'Fertilise the Future' grants – aimed at



Collecting wild flower seed from Long Mead to sow onto Oxford's Christ Church Meadows

finding innovative nature-based solutions – concepts that work with, and enhance, nature to mitigate the impact of the climate crisis on people.

Soil samples collected from key meadow sites in the project area by BBOWT and our partners will be analysed at Open University laboratories to determine the levels of carbon.

Emma Rothero, Floodplain Meadows Partnership Manager at The Open University, explains: "We will be collecting





the first UK-based dataset of soil carbon for floodplain meadows, which will be really important in evidencing why the restoration of species-rich grasslands should be treated with the same urgency as restoration of peat and woodlands. It will also be used to encourage and advise other farmers

## “Meadows are incredibly biodiverse and have the added potential of saving a wide range of our most endangered wildlife.”

and land managers. We'll be sharing this information not just in this country, but with our partners in Germany and beyond.”

### Nature's helping hand

Floodplain meadows stretch back a thousand years and were once the backbone of the rural economy in England. The last century has seen a catastrophic loss of Britain's meadows as a result of development, mineral extraction and the intensification of agriculture. Today, over

97% of our meadow habitats have been lost and only four square miles of floodplain meadow remain.

The section of the Thames identified for this project is recognised as one of the most important in Europe for floodplain meadows. Another key part of this partnership involves Long Mead's Thames Valley Wildflower Meadow Restoration Project, which is working with local farmers to restore the Thames-side meadows to their former glory. The aim is to join up the fragments of original floodplain meadow creating a corridor of connected habitats upstream from Oxford. This will hopefully stem further loss and support the survival of the many animals that depend on them.

Catriona Bass, the co-founder of the Thames Valley Wildflower Meadow

Restoration Project, says meadows are incredibly biodiverse and have the added potential of saving a wide range of our most endangered wildlife. As well as providing beautiful places for people to visit, they can provide sustainably produced food for us to eat.

“In a changing climate with frequent flooding it is becoming increasingly unviable to grow arable crops in the floodplain,” says Catriona. “Oxford has suffered flooded fields and failed arable crops. Meadows, with their

### What is a floodplain meadow?

Floodplain meadows are grasslands that flood frequently. They support a huge diversity of wild flowers and grasses that can provide a generous crop of hay each year, without artificial fertilisers.

Throughout the spring and early summer, floodplain meadows dazzle with their wild flowers and waving grasses, humming with insects and the birds that nest and feed in them. At the best sites, more than 40 species of grasses and wild flowers can be recorded in just one square metre.

huge diversity of plants in the hay crop, are much more resilient to changing weather patterns. Floodplain meadows have been the most sustainable and economically productive means of land use for more than a thousand years.”

As well as soil carbon, the team will also be undertaking an ecological survey further upstream on Chimney Meadows Nature Reserve, 20 years on from restoration efforts on some of the nature reserve, to measure long-term changes in plant and invertebrate communities. This will help to build a picture of changes over time in restored floodplain meadows.

Conservation Strategy Director, Dr Prue Addison, adds: “Beyond their benefit for wildlife and the climate, restored meadows are also nature-based solutions that help slow the flow and filter water that comes off the land. Really importantly, that will mitigate the impact of flooding of local communities, so floodplain meadows are good for climate, nature and people and we must work to protect and restore them.”

Information gained from the project will be shared with government policymakers and local communities throughout the UK to promote this important habitat. The project team hopes to use its findings to empower citizens as scientists, better equipping them to understand and engage with environmental issues. As the UK prepares to host the global climate conference COP26 in the autumn, never has it been more important to highlight the power of nature as a vital defence against the climate emergency. 🌱



More on our partners:  
[longmeadwildlifesite.org.uk](https://longmeadwildlifesite.org.uk)  
[floodplainmeadows.org.uk](https://floodplainmeadows.org.uk)



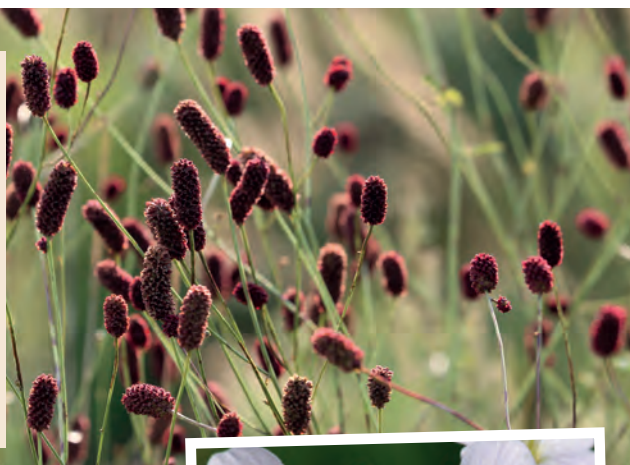
# Setting the scene

Floodplain meadows are among the most diverse habitats in the country – a colourful tapestry of wild flowers waving in the breeze to a theme tune of industriously buzzing, thrumming insects and the plaintive calls of grassland birds. Here are some of the local performers in this riverside drama

## Blooming marvels

### Great burnet

**Flowers:** June–September  
Blood-red, bulbous blooms synonymous with floodplain meadows. This perennial has very extensive roots that help plants survive for decades.



## Iconic birds

### Curlew

Curlews have long, curved bills that are perfect for probing softer areas of mud as they seek out the next titbit. Their searching, evocative 'cur-lee' call is unmistakable. Identify them in flight by the white wedge on their rump.



### Skylark

The skylark's soaring song touches the soul and stirs the spirit. They soar in height too, reaching 300m before parachuting back down to earth. These ground-nesting birds can raise up to four broods in a good year.



### Meadow vetchling

**Flowers:** May–August  
This pea family member scrambles and climbs through taller growth with the aid of its tendrils in a similar way to sweet peas. Insects love it.

GUY EDWARDS/2020VISION



### Cuckooflower

**Flowers:** April–June  
So called because its flowering is traditionally believed to coincide with the first cuckoo of spring. Look for the delicate pink flowers from April.



### Devil's-bit scabious

**Flowers:** June–October  
Its pincushion-like flowers are a boon to a wide range of pollinating insects. Flowers on into autumn, making it a valuable late nectar source.



### Common knapweed

**Flowers:** June–September  
The thistle-like flower heads attract a wide range of butterflies such as the common blue and marbled white which come to drink its nectar.





## Winged wonders

### White-legged damselfly

**Flight period:** April-September  
Broad, pale legs give this damselfly its name. It is quite rare but more common along this stretch of the river.



### Common blue

**Flight period:** April-October  
The most commonly occurring blue butterfly, found not just in meadows but often heathland, parks and gardens too.

### Marbled white

**Flight period:** June-August  
Like a chessboard on wings, this black-chequered butterfly loves warm wild flower-rich grassland. Often seen on purple flowers like common knapweed.



### Orange-tip

**Flight period:** April-July  
Given this year's cooler spring you might catch these on the wing as late as August. Cuckooflower is one of the caterpillar's preferred foodplants.



## See for yourself

Several stretches of the Upper Thames through Oxfordshire offer a glimpse of how the river would have looked centuries ago. Revel in the sights, sounds and smells of this rare but important habitat at Chimney Meadows. An arable farm till 2003, BBOWT has restored

this ancient landscape to its former glory, demonstrating how we can turn back the clock on floodplain meadow loss.



Download a map and plan your visit at

[bbowt.org.uk/chimney-meadows](http://bbowt.org.uk/chimney-meadows)

## Small mammals

### Field vole

One of the most common mammals, the field vole is busy day and night, feeding on seeds, roots and leaves. It helps support predators like the barn owl.



### Harvest mouse

An adult harvest mouse weighs as little as a 2p coin! No surprise, then, that you are more likely to spot its round, woven-grass nest rather than the tiny mammal itself.

### Common shrew

This small shrew has a protruding, pointy nose ideal for sniffing out its dinner: insects, spiders and earthworms. Just as well, as it needs to feed every two to three hours!



### Water vole

By the river is where you'll find 'Ratty'. Tell-tale signs of their presence include nibbled grass 'lawns' next to their burrows and latrines of cigar-shaped droppings.





# Get involved!

Take part and explore all that BBOWT has to offer as we start to reopen our full programme of events and activities – both online and in person!

## Welcome back!

With Covid restrictions finally easing we're delighted to be able begin the return back to our in-person events programme (though there will be plenty of online events too!). Join our expert guides, wardens and speakers to discover the local wildlife and habitats that make our nature reserves and the wider countryside so special. Join a guided walk around a reserve near you, sign your little ones up for a friendly Nature Tots session or discover the fascinating natural history of the area on one of our talks. For the most up-to-date diary of events please visit [bbowt.org.uk/events](http://bbowt.org.uk/events)

## Woodland wander

Bowdown Woods is a natural playground that invites you to explore all year round – a place of mysterious hidden valleys and sunny glades, precious wild flowers, ponds, and patches of heathland.

Follow our reserve warden on an audio trail around this remarkable reserve. Learn about bats and the importance of deadwood, the art of coppicing, threats to the woodland from ash dieback and deer, and the reptiles that call the heathland home. Join the tour whenever you're ready. Simply look out for the markers which include a QR code link to scan and hear more about what you can see along the way. Alternatively, when you reach the relevant points you can click on the links found on the website to listen to the accompanying clip. Preview the tour on the website at [bbowt.org.uk/bowdownaudio](http://bbowt.org.uk/bowdownaudio)

New  
audio  
trail!



Bowdown Woods and  
(inset) a noctule bat



## A packed day out

Looking for more than just a stroll? Our two visitor centres offer interactive displays, a place to shop wildlife-themed products and cosy cafés with spectacular backdrops to break for a drink and snack on your visit.

The College Lake Visitor Centre near Tring is an environmentally friendly building with a panoramic view over the ever-changing lake. Younger visitors can pick up a Nature Passport with which to explore the reserve and there are challenges and activities to try. See which birds you can spot from one of the lakeside hides, gather green-fingered inspiration from the wildlife garden, or follow the signposted walks and QR trail.

The Nature Discovery Centre at Thatcham is a fantastic family day out. Learn more about the site's natural history through the life-like displays, have a go at the interactive puzzles and activities, and let the children run free in the adventure playgrounds. There are lots of tranquil nooks in which to de-stress, a community orchard – oh, and one of the largest areas of inland reedbed in southern England to discover!



STEVE MENDHAM



Both our Visitor Centres run a varied programme of events and activities for visitors of all ages.

For full details of what's on or to make a booking head to [bbowt.org.uk/events](https://bbowt.org.uk/events). For more information on the visitor centres visit [bbowt.org.uk/explore/visitor-centres](https://bbowt.org.uk/explore/visitor-centres)

## Caught on camera

To experience the true awe and majesty of a place there's nothing like being there, in the moment, but photos and videos can certainly whet the appetite for a future visit. If you haven't yet viewed our virtual nature reserve tours now's the perfect time to do so with more tours soon to be uploaded.

The BBOWT YouTube channel includes tours of College Lake and Dancersend with Pavis Woods, led by knowledgeable wardens Leo Keedy and Mick Jones. Tours of Warburg Nature Reserve and Chimney Meadows have also been filmed and will be uploaded within the next few weeks, while a tour of the expansive heathland at Greenham and Crookham Commons will follow later this summer. Don't miss out – subscribe to the channel and click the bell icon so you're notified when these and other videos go live: [youtube.com/user/BBOWildlifeTrust](https://youtube.com/user/BBOWildlifeTrust)



ANTONIA SALTER

## Virtual reality

This year's BBOWT Annual General Meeting is open to all members and we hope to see many of you there. Following the success of last year's event, the AGM and accompanying Volunteer Awards will again be held virtually.



The date for your diaries is  
Saturday 9 October from 10.30am.

Please visit [bbowt.org.uk/AGM2021](https://bbowt.org.uk/AGM2021) for details of how to book your place. The AGM 2021 documents will also be available via this link from 9 September.



JOHN BRIDGES

## Sign up for more



Don't forget to sign up to our free Nature Notes e-newsletter for all the latest news across BBOWT, along with ideas to experience nature wherever you live. We will send you emails packed with ingenious ways to connect with wildlife, including activities for children at home, simple ways to help garden wildlife, and plenty to read and listen to.

## Follow us!



[youtube.com/BBOWildlifeTrust](https://youtube.com/BBOWildlifeTrust)



[facebook.com/bbowildlifetrust](https://facebook.com/bbowildlifetrust)



[twitter.com/bbowt](https://twitter.com/bbowt)



[flickr.com/photos/bbowt](https://flickr.com/photos/bbowt)



[pinterest.com/bbowt](https://pinterest.com/bbowt)



[instagram.com/bbowt](https://instagram.com/bbowt)



# Night riders

A shadowy flight into the twilight world of bats

Summer nights may be shorter, but they're alive with activity as a host of nocturnal creatures make the most of the hours of darkness. Tawny owls listen for rodents rustling across woodland floors, moths flicker around night-scented flowers, and bats swoop through the air, hunting the insects that swarm in the night.

There are 17 species of bat that breed in the UK, from Natterer's bats that snatch

spiders from their webs, to Daubenton's bats that fish insects from the surface of lakes and rivers. The most widespread and frequently seen are the common and soprano pipistrelles, zigzagging through the air as they feast on up to 3,000 insects a night. Their nocturnal nature can make bats a challenge to watch, but there are few moments as magical as seeing these shadowy silhouettes sweep across a darkening sky. 🦇



Discover how  
else you can help  
bats and where to  
see them at  
[bbowt.org.uk/bats](http://bbowt.org.uk/bats)

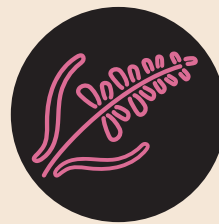


# Our tips for batwatching...



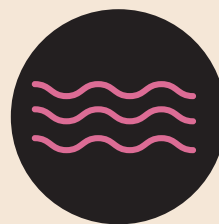
## Study the flight

Bats have different flight patterns, which can give you an idea of the species you're watching. Pipistrelles fly erratically, noctules have a direct flight with sudden swoops, and brown long-eared bats have a slow, hovering flight.



## Bring the bats to you!

Water features are the best bat attractors, but also fill your garden with a variety of insect-tempting flowers to create a banquet for bats. Pale and night-scented flowers are particularly popular with nocturnal pollinators. Bat boxes high on walls or trees can offer a safe space to roost.



## Wait by water

Just like other animals, bats need to drink, so they're often found around waterways. Stretches of sheltered, still or slow-moving water also attract clouds of insects that they can hunt. You may even see a Daubenton's bat hunting low across the water.



## Go where the insects are

Bats are found in a range of habitats, from farmland to forests to gardens. They can often be seen hunting around features that attract insects, like trees, hedges and woodland edges.



## Use a bat detector

The easiest way to find and identify bats is with the help of a bat detector. This device picks up the high-pitched echolocation calls of bats and makes them audible to humans. Different species echolocate at different frequencies, so we can work out which bat we're hearing. Bat detectors come in a range of prices and complexities and may take a bit of practice to use.



## Watch the weather

It's harder for bats to hunt on damp or windy nights, so choose a dry, still evening for your bat watching expedition. A sheltered spot will attract bats if there is a bit of wind.



## Arrive before sunset

Bats are easiest to spot around dusk, when they emerge to feed and there's still enough light to see them. Our largest bat, the noctule, is often the first to emerge, sometimes before the sun has set. Children and some adults can often hear these without a detector!



# Community Gardening

Come together with your community to make more space for nature.

ILLUSTRATION: KATY FROST

## Add bird boxes and bee hotels

Help wildlife find your shared garden, by providing homes! Find that DIY expert in your community and get building.

## Set up a community compost heap

These work really well, helping to reduce waste sent to landfill as well as provide a home for wildlife and compost for mulching.

## Plant native trees

Many parks and shared spaces have room for a few trees and people love planting them. Set up a crowdfunder to buy a few and plant them together with your neighbours.

## Make a small pond

A source of water is really important for wildlife, for drinking and bathing. People will be drawn there too if you pop in a bench.

## Grow plants for bees

Everyone knows bees are in trouble and wants to help them. Grow herbs like lavender, oregano, rosemary and chives.



**T**wice a year, I meet up with other members of my local community to plant up and tidy the planters on my local high street. While we work we chat, discuss planting methods and the best plants for bees. Some of us take clippings home to compost. Many of us end up in the pub afterwards. It's a lovely thing to do, both for the community, the local wildlife and ourselves. Thanks to Covid we missed a session last year, but we have a date in the diary for summer and I'm looking forward to getting back to work.

Community gardens and gardening help bring communities together. They can be on virtually any patch of land, from large planters on a main road like the ones I tend, to a park or church grounds (or a section of them) — I've even seen community gardens set up in raised beds on a little corner of pavement. The space doesn't matter, it's what you do with it that counts.

Whether you grow veg, flowers or focus on wildlife gardening there's plenty of reward to reap from your efforts. You'll learn more about planting for nature, and can then pass this knowledge on to other members of your community, young and old. As a result, you'll bring more nature to your and others' doorsteps.

If you want to start gardening with your local community then start with your local park. There may already be a 'Friends of' group set up that you can join, but if there isn't then set one up yourself — other 'Friends of' groups should be able to help you. You'll be amazed how many people in your community want to come out and help improve the area, and you'll make new friends, too!



For more tips on how to make green spaces wilder, visit: [bbowt.org.uk/actions](https://bbowt.org.uk/actions)



**Kate Bradbury**

is passionate about wildlife-friendly gardening and the author of *Wildlife Gardening for Everyone* and *Everything* in association with The Wildlife Trusts.

### Grow vegetables

Many people want to grow veg but lack the confidence. Start with courgettes, beans and strawberries. Teach people how to sow seeds and raise crops themselves.

### Garden organically

Use a combination of companion planting and wildlife gardening to move away from using chemicals, helping your community to learn how to garden in a wildlife-friendly way.

### Create mini habitats

Make log, leaf and stick piles for wildlife to live in, and leave seedheads and long grass over winter. Children will love making (and exploring!) homes for wildlife.

BUTTERFLY  
AND BEE  
GARDEN



# *Farming with* **Nature**

Farmland has huge potential to benefit our struggling wildlife, but as **Ellie Brodie** reveals, there's a lot of work to be done.



YELLOW WAGTAIL © CHRIS GOMERSALL/2020VISION

Yellow wagtails feast on farmland insects, but have declined by 68% since the 1970s





**Ellie** is a passionate advocate of nature-friendly farming and has been leading The Wildlife Trusts' national land management policy and influencing work since 2016

Let me paint a picture of a farming landscape that makes space for nature. Wildflowers fill the farms with colour, covering upland hay meadows and lowland field margins, blooming in hedgerows and verges. This profusion of pollen and nectar supports a dazzling and buzzing array of butterflies, bees and other wild pollinators. New greenery encourages all sorts of beetles, bugs, flies and caterpillars, opening up a buffet for birds, from sweet-singing skylarks to wading birds like lapwings.

Small mammals like wood mice and field voles also gorge themselves on insects, as well as hedgerow berries and nuts, occupying an important mid-way point in the food chain, in turn prey for badgers and buzzards. Ponds, ditches and dykes provide spawning areas for frogs, toads and newts, and homes for darting dragon- and damselflies.

If you're lucky, by day you might spot a water vole nibbling stems along a grassy bank or a brown hare bounding across a field. By night you may see the dark shadows of bats swooping across the sky, or the spectral shape of a barn owl quartering a field.

This is a landscape full of life, busy with birdsong and bees. Now trade the variety and complexity of this picture with one of monoculture and monotony. This, sadly, is the more realistic and commonplace version of farmland that exists today.

### Farming at scale

Farmland makes up the vast majority — around three quarters — of land use in the UK. Given its scale, it makes sense that what happens in the farmed environment has a huge impact on wildlife.

In today's farming, vast swathes of the countryside are given over to doing one thing at scale: from growing maize, sugar beet, or Sitka spruce to battery chicken farming or factory-scale dairy farming. With scale and efficiency comes doing one thing, and one thing only. This generally means a high level of inputs from synthetic fertilisers, lethal insecticides, toxic weedkillers or the routine use of antibiotics in livestock. It also means uniformity and monoculture — be this conifer plantations, drained upland bogs or effectively a green desert of a single arable crop and nothing else.

Farming on this industrial scale impacts on nature and on the climate. Agricultural chemicals and slurry leech into waterways, harming fish, insects, amphibians and mammals like water voles and otters. Insecticides kill the flying, crawling and wiggling insects that other creatures higher up the food chain depend on — including us humans, who rely on pollinators for around a third of the world's food crop production. Nitrogen-based fertilisers ruin soil health and contribute to climate change.







Habitat destruction, from the loss of both upland and lowland hay meadows to the removal of features, which provide corridors for wildlife — the hedgerows, ditches, and strips of woodland — to create larger and simpler areas to crop or graze has caused the plummeting fortunes of a wide range of wildlife; from dormice, water voles and bats to breeding waders like snipe and rare wildflowers, grasses and shrubs.

#### **Driven by policy**

Agriculture policy has incentivised this model of farming for decades. But now is a time of change, as the UK has left the EU and therefore the Common

Agricultural Policy (CAP). In November 2020, the first domestic Agriculture Act was passed since 1947, moving us into a period of transition towards post-EU agriculture policies. This means what farmers are paid for and the rules they have to follow will change; and as agricultural policy is devolved, this will vary across the four UK countries.

Under the CAP the majority of funding for farmers (88%) was made through area-based payments schemes. Farmers were paid to comply with a basic set of rules and in return received a payment based on how much land they owned. The remaining 12% of the budget was for

schemes that provided environmental benefit. Around £2.4 billion was distributed in this way across the four UK countries.

The Westminster Government has committed to maintaining the agricultural budget until the next general election — expected in 2024. In England and Wales, governments are refocusing the agricultural spend away from area-based payments and towards specific activities that farmers can do to tackle environmental issues, including wildlife loss, climate change and water pollution. Scotland is continuing and improving the CAP until 2024.

## **Farmland makes up the vast majority, about three quarters, of land use in the UK**

Whilst refocusing spend towards environmental activities is positive, a research report The Wildlife Trusts released with the RSPB and National Trust in 2019 found that much more is needed: the entire agricultural budget if spent on the environment would not be enough to recover nature on farmland in its current state.

Wildflower margins are great for pollinators like bees and butterflies







**T**he Wildlife Trusts' long-standing partnership with Jordans Cereals helps the farmers who grow oats for Jordans to farm in harmony with nature. Every farmer in the Jordans Farm partnership is committed to managing at least 10% of their farmed land for wildlife and works closely with a farm advisor from their local Wildlife Trust, protecting wildlife from barn owls to butterflies. Collectively, they manage more than 4,000 hectares for wildlife, including:

- **475 ha** field margins
- **94** ponds
- **717 km** of hedgerows
- **136 km** of waterways
- **692 ha** of woodland

Find out more at



[wildlifetrusts.org/jordans](http://wildlifetrusts.org/jordans)



**M**any Wildlife Trusts own or manage farmland for nature. In 2001, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust purchased the 65 hectare Lower Smite Farm to demonstrate how sensitive farming techniques can improve the quality of the agricultural landscape for wildlife. This working arable farm is now a haven for wildlife, with management strategies

focussing on soil health, connectivity and year-round food supplies for wildlife. With the help of volunteers, they've planted woodlands, hedgerows and wildflowers. Every spring, skylark song tumbles from the sky; in summer up to 15 different species of dragonfly dart above the ponds; and in winter, charms of finches flock to the supplemental wild bird seed mix.

Departing from the EU means the rules will change. At The Wildlife Trusts we continue to press for high environmental standards. This includes pushing for new legislation, as with the Environment Bill currently making its way through Parliament and through new regulations. Wildlife Trusts Wales, for example, was instrumental in influencing the Welsh Government earlier this year to introduce new regulations for water pollution from agriculture. Regulations need enforcing, and in England, deep cuts to regulators like the Environment Agency limit its ability to enforce regulations like Farming Rules for Water.

### Nature-friendly farming in action

Besides our work influencing policy and legislation, Wildlife Trusts across the UK are working to help farmland wildlife, both on land we own and through advice we give others. We are restoring hay meadows in Lancashire and rewetting fenland in Cambridgeshire. We're reintroducing and supporting threatened species — from dormice in Nottinghamshire to water voles in Essex. We're helping farmers work together to join up their land to provide highways for

bees in Worcestershire and advising them on how to minimise their use of chemicals in Shropshire. We're providing advice to farmers supplying oats to Jordans Cereal on how to provide for nature on their land, whilst demonstrating how farming and nature can go hand in hand through our own working farms from Cumbria down to Dorset. And in Yorkshire, we're providing traineeships in livestock management and grazing.

You can help farmland wildlife from home by supporting your Wildlife Trust and by taking action for nature: stop using chemicals, and use natural flea repellents on your dogs and cats rather than ones

with neonicotinoids that kill bees and other flying insects; create wildlife friendly habitat where you're able, and plant a wildflower window box or make a pond in your garden; support local nature friendly farmers, and go organic where possible; and visit local farms and find out what they are doing — Open Farm Sunday is a great opportunity for this.

Find out more about The Wildlife Trusts' work for farmland wildlife at



[wildlifetrusts.org/farming](http://wildlifetrusts.org/farming)

Untrimmed hedges and wildflower verges at the sides of agricultural fields create corridors for wildlife





# Let's secure more space for nature!

Will you help us buy and restore Ludgershall Meadows so we can create ideal conditions for wildlife to spread and thrive?

**TARGET:**  
£330,000  
**DEADLINE:**  
10 SEPT  
2021

We have an unmissable opportunity to purchase this precious site in the Upper Ray area, near Bicester – but we don't have long! If we fail to secure Ludgershall Meadows, it could fall into the wrong hands, threatening its future. If we succeed, we have the thrilling chance to expand our Upper Ray Meadows nature reserve and restore these meadows to their former glory.

#### More nature everywhere

Colourful, flower-filled meadows, and prime hunting ground for barn owls and short-eared owls; the potential for nature's return is tremendous, but without your help there's no guarantee. Together, with our expertise, we can buy, protect and restore this site for wildlife, safeguarding it forever.

Adding this land to our existing network of meadows will further strengthen and protect the value of the whole area for wildlife. We're striving to have 30% of the land in our region well-managed for wildlife by 2030. With your help, buying Ludgershall Meadows will take us closer to our goal of more nature everywhere.

Please help BBOWT to purchase this very special site and protect it for the plants and wildlife that depend on it, for years to come.

**Donate today!**

Visit [bbowt.org.uk/ludgershall](https://bbowt.org.uk/ludgershall) or call  
**01865 788300**. Thank you for your support!