

TOXIC TOADSTOOLS

Meet the mushrooms
with a deadly secret



FIERCE FISH

Dip into the watery
world of the pike

ISSUE 119

Autumn 2026

Wildlife Watch

MAGAZINE

FREE!

Bat
poster

Eye Spy

Take a peek at
some weird and
wonderful eyes

The
Wildlife
Trusts





Editor's corner

TOM HIBBERT
Editor, Wildlife Watch

It's been a very hot summer! Long spells of hot weather can be tough for people and wildlife, but they're getting more common because of climate change. On page eight, you can find out how governments across the world are working together to try and fight the climate crisis. On page ten we've also got more tips on how you can help from home! Autumn should bring some cooler and probably wetter weather – perfect for mushrooms. Discover some of our most toxic toadstools on page 12. Have a wild autumn!

Tom



GET IN TOUCH

Email us at:
watch@wildlifetrusts.org

Ring us on:
01636 677711

Write to us at:
Wildlife Watch
The Kiln, Mather Road
Newark, Notts, NG24 1WT

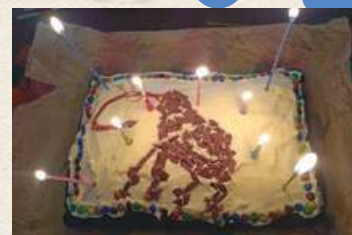
[wildlifetrusts](#)
 [@wildlifetrusts](#)
 [thewildlifetrusts](#)
 [WildlifeWatchUK](#)

WILDTHINGS

NEWS from our Wildlife Watchers

SUPER SISTERS

Nara (aged 5) and Kya (aged 3), from Hertfordshire, have been litter picking to help wildlife. They also talk to people about the harm that litter does. Kya made a poster about litter picking, Nara made one about the impact of plastic in the ocean. Great use of paper mache!



TAKING THE CAKE!

Nine-year-old Nesta from Wiltshire wrote a song about acorn weevils and even put one on her birthday cake! Nesta was inspired by the acorn weevil poster in the spring issue of Wildlife Watch. You've got great taste, Nesta!

PUDDLE PALS

Merryn (aged 9) and Darcey (aged 11), from Oxfordshire, created this bee and butterfly drinking station. They made it in honour of Sir David Attenborough's 100th birthday. Inspired by his lifelong dedication to nature, they wanted to create something that would help pollinators in their local area.



PURR-FECT PUPIL

Hoebe (aged 7) from West Sussex has been learning all about wildcats, from the conservation work to save them in Scotland to people exploring bringing them back in Devon. You can read more about wildcats on page 20!



SHORE SEARCH

Eight-year-olds Charlotte and Bella from Dorset found a sea urchin shell on the beach! They were very excited as they'd never found a whole one before.

Fox by Watch reader, Pip



14



16



20



18

In this Issue

Regulars

- 02 Wild Things
- 04 The Science Section
- 05 Your Stories
- 10 Be a Climate Champion
- 11 Hedgehog Poster
- 14 Gallery
- 16 Weird Nature
Weird eyes
- 17 How to...
Make a leaf stack
- 22 Feature Creature
Smooth newt
- 23 The Big Questions
How do mushrooms pop up overnight?
- 24 Competitions



Features

- 06 The Water Wolf
Discover a ferocious fish
- 08 A Changing World
The fight against the climate crisis
- 12 Toxic Toadstools
- 18 The Thrush Rush
- 20 Cat of the Woods

WILDLIFE WATCH 119

Editor: Tom Hibbert

Editorial Team: Sara Mills, Jamey Redway, Leanne Smart, Kelly Spencer, Mike Watson

Design: Sean Coleman



Check out [wildlifewatch.org.uk/privacy-policy](https://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/privacy-policy) to find out how we keep your information safe.

What's Wildlife Watch?

Wildlife Watch is the junior branch of The Wildlife Trusts. Join Wildlife Watch and start your nature adventure. Prices range from £10-£24 per year for child-only membership and £30-£60 for family membership. You'll receive a starter pack and four issues of Wildlife Watch magazine a year. This is

packed full of amazing pictures, posters and competitions. We also have a really wild website and e-newsletter full of wild ideas and nature-spotting tips. Plus you get access to local events and groups. Go to [wildlifewatch.org.uk](https://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk) to find out more.



Keep watching!

The Science Section

Ever wondered what that weird-sounding word meant or desperate to know what the latest wonderful wildlife discovery is? Well, here we bring you a fact-packed science section so you can impress your friends with your knowledge!

Wild Words

Wow your friends with new words from the world of wildlife science!

Zugunruhe (tsu-kun-roo-uh)

This word comes from German and means migratory restlessness. It's used to describe the restlessness of birds as the seasons change and they get the urge to migrate.

Abscission (ab-sish-uhn)

The name for when parts of a plant break off naturally, like when leaves fall from trees in autumn.

Equinox (ek-wuh-nocks)

The day when the midpoint of the sun crosses the Earth's equator, making day and night almost the same length. It happens twice a year, at the start of spring and the start of autumn.

Bright bees

Scientists have discovered that bumblebees can use tools to solve problems! In an experiment, garden bumblebees were trained to visit a fake flower to get a sugar water treat. Then the flower was moved to a low ceiling, where it was too high to reach but there wasn't enough room to hover and feed on it. The bumblebees figured out how to roll a ball underneath the flower, so they could climb onto the ball and reach their sugary treat. Impressive for a creature with a brain smaller than a sesame seed!

Turtle power

A recent experiment has given us a better idea of how turtles find their way around using the Earth's magnetic field. Scientists attached devices to green turtle shells that could tell which way the turtle was facing (like a compass) and track its movements around the world. The turtles took around 27 days to swim from nesting grounds in the Chagos Archipelago to feeding grounds more than 600 miles away. The turtles tended to swim in straight lines in one direction, occasionally changing direction to get back on course. It's like they're using a rough map, checking a compass every now and then to make sure they're going the right way, rather than a sat nav that plots the exact route.

YOUR STORIES

A wild award

by Edie, aged 12

H

ello Wildlife Watch! My name is Edie and last autumn I won an Environmental Jack Petchey award! To win it, I had to fill in a form explaining what I did to help the environment. This included growing my own organic vegetables and fruit: beans, strawberries, raspberries, apples and lettuce; doing a species count to help record wildlife in a local Environmental Centre; going litter picking; walking or getting public transport where possible; and keeping a bird feeder filled up with food (only in winter to prevent bird flu).

When I won the award, I was given some money to choose a project to do in my school to help the environment. I decided to put up bird feeders and bird houses in my school! I also planted a hawthorn tree and a rowan tree.

I've always loved birds and I keep a record of rarely seen birds that I spot (a golden eagle, osprey, a whole "kettle" of buzzards, heron nests and more!).

In July, I got to go to the awards ceremony and meet other young people helping the environment. When I'm older, I want to be an environmentalist!



Do you want to be featured in the magazine? Send your stories, ideas or photos to watch@wildlifetrusts.org!

Let's take a deep dive into the watery world of the pike!

THE WATER WOLF

by Pete Dommert



A long, blade-shaped body slides silently through underwater reed stems at the edge of a lake. A pike – one of the UK's largest freshwater fish. It's huge, hostile and very, very hungry!



The pike has lots of nicknames around the world, including water wolf, gator and snot rocket.



PETE is a wildlife writer. He often spots a pike in the small stream by his local supermarket!

RIVER RULERS

Just how big is a pike? Males measure about 75 cm in length and weigh 4 to 5 kg. That's pretty big, but females are even bigger! They're nearly twice as long as the male fish and up to five times as heavy. The largest pike ever found in the UK weighed more than 24 kg – that's heavier than an average 7-year-old child! Is it heavier than you?

A large female pike might lay 500,000 eggs in the breeding season!

A female pike can live for more than 20 years!

CANNIBAL KIN

A young pike (called a jack) feeds on insects at first, but then turns on its siblings (brothers and sisters) and eats them! Adult pike will also eat each other. Smaller males are especially in danger of being gobbled up by much larger females!

AMBUSH EXPERT

When it comes to hunting, a pike is more like a tiger than a wolf! Camouflaged by its greeny-yellow stripes, it hides among weeds waiting for anything edible to swim by. Then it switches into stealth mode – slowly creeping closer to its target until...BANG! The pike suddenly shoots forward and grabs its victim in its huge mouth. Hundreds of razor-sharp teeth (including some on the fish's tongue!) hold the prey in place. If the catch is too long to be swallowed in a single gulp, the pike will leave one end sticking out of its mouth while the other end is digested in its stomach!

Remember: always be careful near water. Ask an adult to join your quest!

SENSITIVE SOUL

A pike doesn't just hunt by sight. In muddy, murky water it uses its excellent sense of smell to follow the scent trails of other fish. Special sensory organs on the pike's head and body can also detect the electrical signals and vibrations given off by these moving meals!

This feisty fish may be named after a medieval weapon. A pike was a type of long, sharp spear.

PEEK-A-PIKE

Pike live in slow-flowing rivers, reservoirs, canals and lakes all over the UK. Here are some top tips to help you spot one:

- **Walk slowly and quietly along the edge of the water.**
- **Think like a pike! Look for good hiding places – among reeds or underwater tree roots or below overhanging branches.**
- **Wear sunglasses with polarizing lenses – they help you see through the water more easily.**

MONSTER MENU

There's not much that doesn't feature on a pike's favourite food list! This unfussy fish will eat anything that's smaller (even just slightly smaller!) than itself, including:

- Fish
- Frogs and toads
- Water voles, rats and other small mammals
- Ducklings and other water birds, like moorhens
- Other pike!



Find out how countries
come together to tackle
the **CLIMATE CRISIS**

A CHANGING WORLD

by Eleanor Johnston

You've probably heard the words 'climate change' or 'climate crisis'. You might even be worried about it. But what exactly is the climate crisis and what are people doing to fix it? Let's find out!

What is the climate crisis?

When humans burn fossil fuels like oil, gas and coal, it releases gases we call greenhouse gas emissions. These emissions trap heat in the atmosphere and lead to rising global temperatures. This warming, along with the serious impacts it has on our weather, is called climate change. Things have gotten much worse in recent years, and it's now known as the climate crisis. The impacts are being felt by us all today. We're getting hotter and more dangerous heatwaves, more rain that leads to flooding, and rising sea levels. But we can take action to combat climate change – we can reduce emissions and create a world where people and wildlife thrive alongside each other.

Countries working together

We must reduce global emissions to limit the amount our climate changes, to keep both people and nature safe. Countries across the world have come together in something called the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This is basically an agreement that we all need to work together to reduce climate change. Nearly 200 countries are now part of it!



What is a COP?

Every year, these countries meet at something called a COP. COP stands for 'Conference of the Parties'. It basically means a gathering of all the people involved in this agreement. There are usually people from each country's government, but there will be lots of other people there too. COPs usually last around two weeks and take place in a different country each year.

What happens there?

At a COP, countries share ideas, set targets and review progress around climate action. Richer countries are encouraged to help poorer countries deal with climate change. This is important as poorer nations are often more impacted by climate change but can't afford to prepare or recover from it.

What have they done so far?

In 1997, they created the Kyoto Protocol. This was an agreement that richer countries needed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2015, they made the Paris Agreement. This was an agreement to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C (and definitely no more than 2°C) compared to the 1800s.

In 2022, the loss and damage fund was set up. This provides money to help poorer nations who are most impacted by climate change.

In 2023, an agreement was made to "transition away from fossil fuels", so countries stop burning them and stop creating more emissions.

People from all over the world gather at conferences to find solutions to the climate crisis.

Nature can help tackle the climate crisis, if we help nature.



COP31

This November will be COP 31 – the 31st just means it's the 31st time they've met. It will take place in Turkey. Wildlife Trusts really want to see nature at the heart of climate action at COP31. Nature can help reduce flooding by slowing the flow of water, help reduce drought by storing water and help people and wildlife cope with heat through natural shading and cooling. Nature also helps tackle climate change by taking carbon dioxide, a type of greenhouse gas, out of the atmosphere. We must help nature cope with climate change too, helping wildlife deal with a warming world and other weather extremes.

How can we help?

Every action, big or small, makes a difference in the battle against climate change and nature loss. Talking about climate change is a great first step! Talk to your family and friends, help others learn more about it and share ideas to take action. We can also reduce the emissions we produce in our daily lives by making some small changes. Turn to page ten for tips and get even more at wildlifewatch.org.uk/environment

There are little things we can all do to help, from recycling to growing our own vegetables.

© Eve and Tom photography



ELEANOR is climate change manager for The Wildlife Trusts, working to reduce emissions and help people and wildlife cope with climate change.



BE A CLIMATE CHAMPION!

The climate crisis can be scary. The world is getting hotter and it's having an impact on wildlife, wild places and people. But there are lots of people working hard to make things better and we can all help do our bit. In each issue this year, we'll be sharing tips and ideas for fighting the climate crisis this season. Together, we can make a difference!

AUTUMN TIPS

SLOWING THE CHANGE

Lots of the things we do depend on burning fossil fuels like coal and oil. These release gases that increase climate change.

SCHOOL SUPPORT

Tell your teacher about Nature's Climate Heroes. This is a free pack with lots of tips and ideas to help teachers encourage action to fight the climate crisis. They just need to visit: wildlifewatch.org.uk/natures-climate-heroes



SEASONAL SNACKS

Eating food grown on the other side of the world and transported to the UK can use lots of fuel. When we choose to eat fresh food that's grown locally and in the right season, it's better for the planet – and often tastier! Autumn is a great time to look for locally grown food like parsnips, carrots and other root vegetables.

AUTUMN OUTFITS

As the weather starts to get cooler, you might feel the need for a new jumper or coat. Try looking in charity shops first, to see if there's a second-hand one you can buy. It's much better for the planet than producing new clothes.



ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Climate change is already having an impact on nature, but we can help wildlife cope.

LEAVE LEAVES

Instead of bagging up and throwing away fallen leaves in your garden, leave them in piles under bushes or in a corner. This will create a sheltered spot for small creatures to hide away for winter. They also make your soil healthier as they break down.



SOW WILDFLOWERS

Autumn is a great time to plant wildflower seeds. Seeds often need some cold weather to trigger their growing process. Plant them now and they'll start growing in spring, just in time to help feed butterflies, bees and other wildlife. Choosing some wildflowers that bloom in late winter will help bees that wake up earlier due to climate change.



LAZY GARDENING

One of the best ways to help garden wildlife is to do nothing! Instead of tidying up plants and cutting all the dead seedheads and stems, leave a patch alone. Birds may feed on them and insects will hide away in the little spaces.



Hogs in a hurry

Autumn is a busy time for hedgehogs. They spend their nights eating as much as they can, fattening up for their hibernation. Soon they'll make a cosy nest and curl up for the winter.



© Nick Upton

Red deer © Terry Whittaker / 2020VISION

Meet the mushrooms with a poisonous secret!

TOXIC TOADSTOOLS



ELLEN loves finding interesting and beautiful fungi to photograph. The weirder the better!

by Ellen Kinsley

MUSHROOMS come in weird and wonderful shapes, and in all the colours of the rainbow. But they don't just look pretty, they're clever too! Some fungi contain powerful poisons to keep themselves safe from predators... with potentially deadly consequences!

Looking for fungi is great fun! If you see any of these mushrooms, there's no need to worry – just admire them without touching and leave them alone for others to enjoy.

Destroying angel



This pure white mushroom is far from angelic. It lives in woodlands and could be mistaken for edible mushrooms, but watch out! This fearsome fungus contains an extremely powerful toxin, which is deadly if eaten. After several days of painful illness, people can think they're getting better, but the toxin keeps destroying their liver and kidneys, causing organ failure.

Funeral bell



The funeral bell is also known as the deadly skullcap.

These small, brown mushrooms like to live on fallen logs and tree stumps in woodlands. They do a great job recycling the nutrients from dead and decaying wood, but they can cause death too. Eating even a small amount of this mushroom can be lethal.

Deathcap



Death caps, destroying angels and funeral bells all contain the same deadly toxins.

You may hardly notice this olive-brown mushroom growing in the woods, but the deathcap is famous for being fatal. It causes 90% of all mushroom-related deaths around the world. Some people believe that the Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI, Pope Clement VII and Roman Emperor Claudius all died from eating deathcaps (and that Claudius may have been deliberately poisoned!).

Yellow stainer



These white mushrooms turn bright yellow when scratched, giving the yellow stainer its name. They are often found in small groups in grasslands and fields and under hedges. They look similar to some mushrooms you can buy in the shops, but steer clear – they can give you a bad stomach upset and cause vomiting, diarrhoea and sweating.

The Sickener



The sickener has a straight white stem topped with a bright red cap which looks sticky when wet. True to its name, eating this mushroom could make you very unwell. You can find the sickener amongst conifer trees in evergreen forests. There is a very similar mushroom found in beech forests called the beechwood sickener, which is also poisonous!

Poison pie



With its golden brown colour, it may look like a little baked pie, but eating this would make you very ill! The poison pie lives in woodlands and smells strongly of radishes. Like many mushrooms, it forms partnerships with trees to share nutrients and water. Groups of poison pies are often found in circles called 'fairy rings'.

Devil's bolete



Hiding underneath this mushroom's beige cap are bright orange-pink gills and a fabulously chunky, rounded stem. When cut open, its insides turn blue-green – this helps experts identify it. This mushroom makes its home among oak, beech and other broadleaved trees. Also known as Satan's bolete, its toxins are strong enough to send you to hospital.

Panthercap

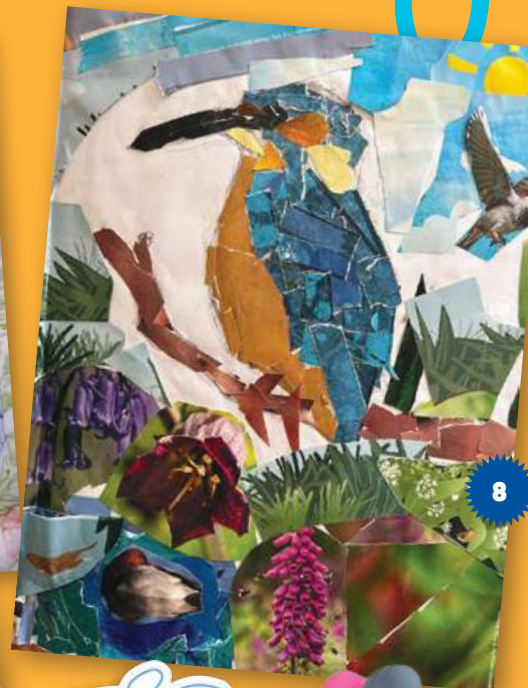
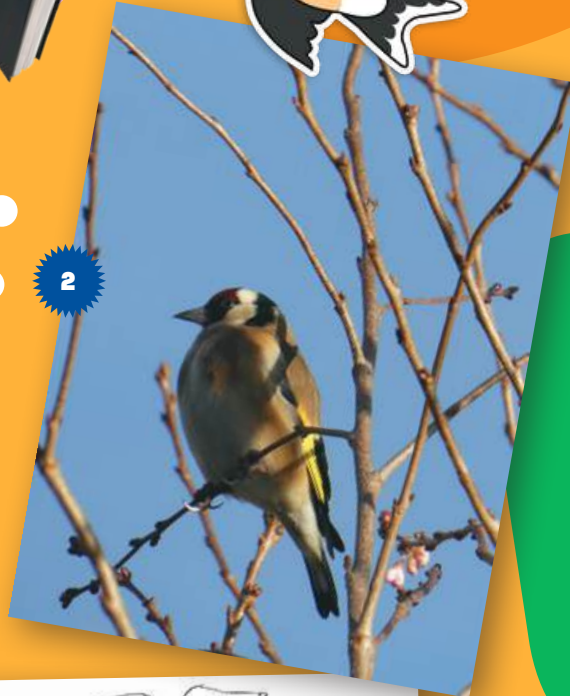


Remember, never eat wild mushrooms unless a fungi expert identifies them as safe.

This pretty brown toadstool with white spots is found among beech and oak trees. It's related to fly agaric, the red and white spotted toadstool often pictured in fairy tales. The panthercap's potent toxins can affect the heart and muscles and cause hallucinations – making people see things that aren't really there. Scary!

Gallery

Send in your photos and artwork of UK wildlife for your chance to feature in the gallery. If your artwork is picked as the star entry you'll win your very own drawing kit! The perfect starter set for any budding wildlife artist.



- 1 Flower hunt by Jack, aged 7** ★
We love the creativity of using a magnifying glass to show a bee visiting one of the flowers.
- 2 Goldfinch by Eva, aged 11**
This is a fabulous photo of a goldfinch.
- 3 Fox by Pip, aged 11**
Wow! Just look at the reflection in this painting.
- 4 Seabirds by Laura, aged 5**
This is a great collection of birds. Which is your favourite?
- 5 Fly agaric by Primrose, aged 4**
The perfect artwork for autumn!
- 6 Octopus by Kitty, aged 12**
The colours in this underwater scene are so vibrant.
- 7 Owl by Ella, aged 8**
It must have taken ages to draw the patterns in this outstanding owl!
- 8 Kingfisher by Margot, aged 9**
Great use of old copies of Wildlife Watch for this collage.
- 9 Pond life by Andre, aged 8**
There's so much wildlife to enjoy in Andre's artwork!
- 10 Ladybird by Aafiya, aged 6**
An excellent model of a ladybird on a flower.
- 11 Sand lizard by Isla, aged 7**
This is a great study of a rarely seen reptile.
- 12 White stork by Chloe, aged 6**
Chloe was inspired after visiting a white stork project.



How to enter

Email watch@wildlifetrusts.org with the subject line 'Gallery entry' or write to us at:
Wildlife Watch Gallery
The Wildlife Trusts
The Kiln, Mather Road
Newark
Notts NG24 1WT

Don't forget to include your first name, age and a way of contacting you if you get star entry! We might also share it on our website and social media.



Weird Nature



THIS ISSUE: WEIRD EYES

Damselflies



It doesn't get much weirder than having your eyes at opposite sides of your head, but that's the look that damselflies have gone for! They look a bit like tiny, flying hammerhead sharks. This gives them an excellent view of their surroundings, including above and behind them.

Undulate ray



Rays and skates, like the undulate ray found around the UK, have special flaps that cover part of each eye. The undulate ray's flaps have lots of little finger-like bits sticking out. It's thought these flaps might help control the amount of light entering the eye. They may also help the fish camouflage as it sits on the seabed.

Horseflies



Horseflies are best known for their painful bite, but they should be known for their beautiful eyes! In many horseflies they're metallic green or red. Some even have jazzy squiggles or other patterns on them. It's only females that bite, but they usually have the fanciest eyes.

Cuttlefish



In darkness, cuttlefish have round pupils. But in bright light, they become W-shaped! Scientists think this helps them deal with the uneven light in their underwater home. Bright sunlight from above can make it harder to adjust to the low light around them, but the W-shape helps reduce the brightness from above. It might also help with camouflage, similar to the undulate ray.

Jumping spiders



Spiders are famous for having eight legs, but most also have eight eyes. Not all of their eyes are the same size though. Jumping spiders have two massive eyes at the front of their face, which they use to stalk their prey and pounce with deadly precision. Then they have three smaller eyes on each side of their head, to help look out for danger around them.

Flatfish



When flatfish (like this plaice) hatch they look like most other fish, swimming around with an eye on each side of their head. As they grow, one of their eyes moves onto the other side! The adult fish spends a lot of time sitting on its side on the seafloor, so needs both eyes on the side facing up.



How to make a leaf stack

You will need

- Garden wire
- A stick or a small piece of wood
- Lots of different coloured autumn leaves
- Other natural items, like conkers or catkins

1 Wrap the end of your length of wire around your stick or small piece of wood. This acts as a weight to keep your wire straight.

2 Collect leaves from the ground. If you can, choose lots of different colours. Thread them on to your wire.

3 You can also add other natural items, like conkers and catkins.

Ask an adult to drill a hole in the conker for you.

4 Hang your leaf stack in your house or in the garden!

If you're feeling really creative you can even make a bird feeder using fruit, like apples.



Every autumn, THOUSANDS of thrushes cross the North Sea to spend the winter with us.

THE THRUSH RUSH



AUTUMN IS A TIME OF CHANGE.

The weather is changing, the trees are changing and the birds we see are changing too! Swifts, swallows and other summer visitors are heading south for the winter. They're replaced by birds that travel to the UK from colder countries in the north and east, including huge numbers of thrushes!

REDWINGS

These small thrushes are best recognised by the pale stripe above their eye, or the patch of rusty red under each wing. A few redwings nest in the UK, almost always in northern Scotland. But in autumn, around 700,000 more can arrive! They fill the skies in noisy flocks as they cross the North Sea from Fennoscandia and Russia. Others come from Iceland, flying over the wild Atlantic. Many will stay for the winter, but others will drift further south into Europe or even North Africa.



© Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography



© Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography

FIELDFARES

These large thrushes are dressed in the colours of winter. They have an icy grey head and rump, a chestnut back and a snow-white belly. One or two pairs try to nest in Britain in some years, but you're unlikely to see them. That changes in autumn, when hundreds of thousands of fieldfares can arrive for the winter! Like redwings, they come from Fennoscandia, Eastern Europe and Russia.



© Richard Seal / 2020VISION



© Chris Gurnea / 2020VISION

Thrush finding tips



LISTEN OUT! You often hear them before you see them. Redwings make a 'tseep' sound that can often be heard at night – try listening from your garden on October evenings. Fieldfares sound like they're chuckling.

LOOK FOR BERRY BUSHES. Thrushes love to eat them. Watch from a distance, as they can be nervous.

SOMETIMES YOU CAN SEE FLOCKS OF BIRDS MIGRATING DURING THE DAY. This is called visible migration, or vismig. Your best chance is on the east coast or a high hill, but with luck you can see birds anywhere. You'll have to get up early, as the first few hours of the day are often the best!

GROW FRUIT TREES AND BERRY BUSHES IN YOUR GARDEN. You might get thrushes spending the winter with you.



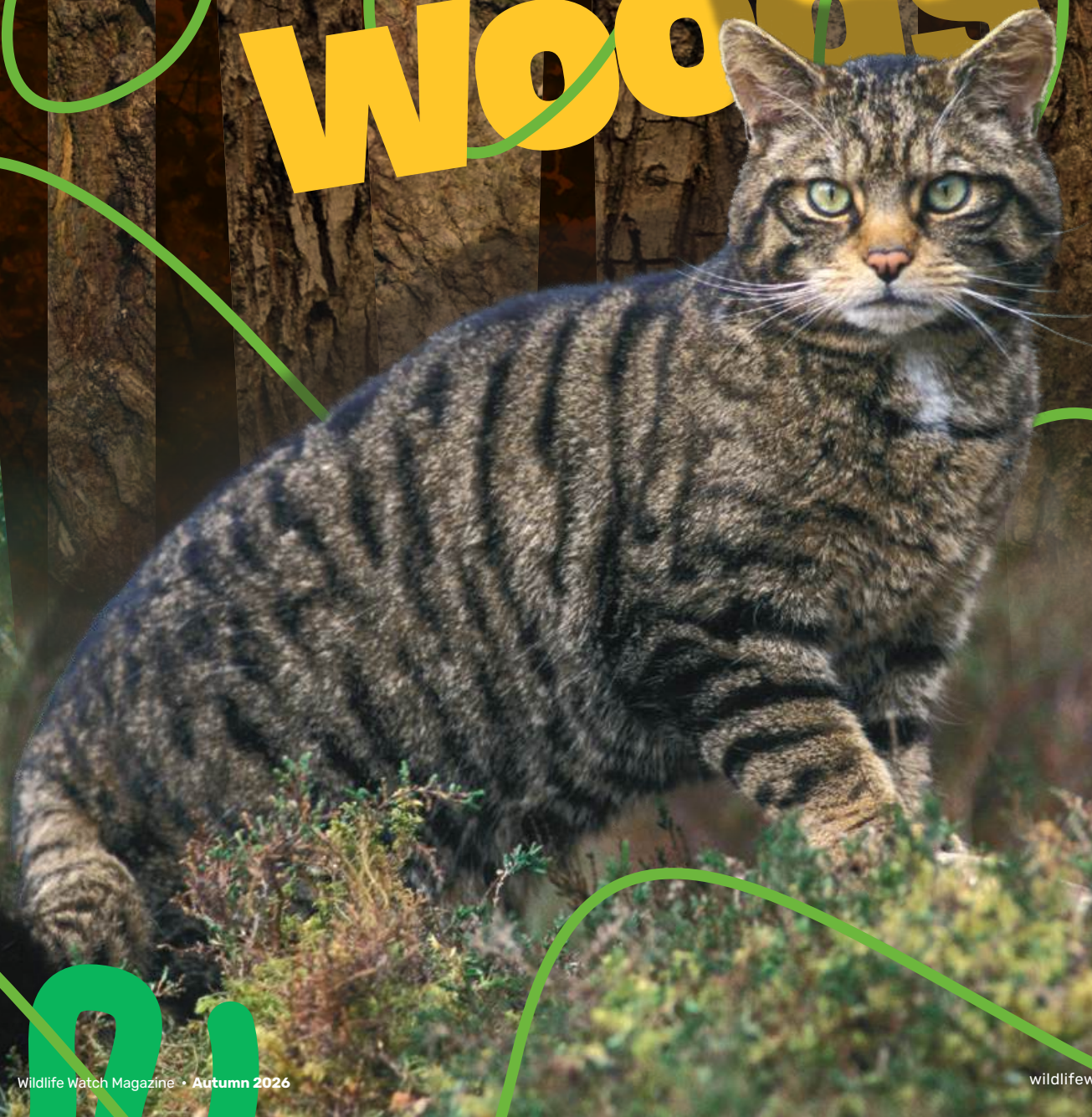
© Mark Hamblin / 2020VISION

BLACKBIRDS

Have you got a blackbird in your garden? It could be a local bird that lives in your area all year. Or it could be a mighty migrant, whose wings carried it through storms and over rolling waves, all the way from northern Europe to your lawn! There are around five million pairs of blackbirds in the UK in summer, but even more arrive in autumn to escape the colder weather back home. They aren't the only familiar thrushes to do this. Song thrushes and even a few mistle thrushes flock to the UK in autumn, too.

Meet the WILDCAT, one of the UK's cutest carnivores

cat of the Woods



What is a wildcat?

The European wildcat is a small member of the cat family. It lives in countries across Europe and in Western Asia. It looks a lot like a chunky tabby cat that someone might have as a pet, but it is a completely wild animal. They like areas with woodland where they can hide, as well as some more open areas where they can hunt. The wildcat's scientific name is *Felis silvestris*, which translates as 'cat of the woods'. It was once also known as the woodcat in England.

Cute but not cuddly

Wildcats might look like large tabbies, but they are true wild animals. They are mostly active at night and tend to avoid people. If you are ever lucky enough to see one, it's important to keep your distance and not disturb it. They are skilled hunters and mainly eat voles, rabbits and other small mammals.

Copycats

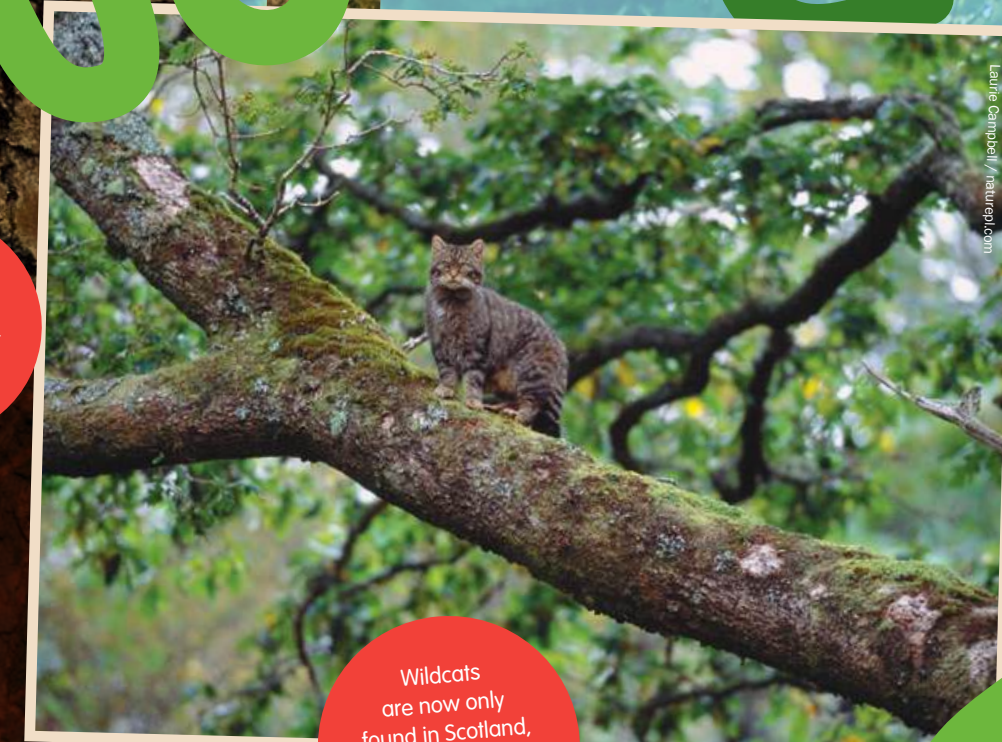
It can be very difficult to tell the difference between a true wildcat and a pet cat. Wildcats are usually stockier, with a tail that has a blunt, black tip. The tail should have clear black bands on it that aren't joined together. They should also have a black stripe along the spine that stops at the base of the tail.

The wildcat is the UK's rarest and most threatened mammal.

Hanging on by a whisker

Wildcats once lived all over Britain. Sadly, people hunted them and they became rarer and rarer. You could even get paid for hunting them! Eventually, there were no wildcats left in England or Wales. They could still be found in Scotland, but only in small numbers in a few areas. Our wildcats were in danger of disappearing from Britain completely!

Our pet cats are descended from African wildcats rather than European wildcats.



Wildcats are now only found in Scotland, but they used to live in England and Wales, too!

A purr-fect plan

A lot of work has been done to save wildcats in Scotland. As well as protecting the wildcats that already live there, the Saving Wildcats project was set up to raise new wildcats and release them in suitable wild places. Since 2023, the project has released more than 40 wildcats. So far, the plan is working! Many of the wildcats they released raised kittens of their own. The future of our wildcats isn't safe yet though, there's still lots of work to be done to make sure they're here to stay.

Comeback cats

As well as saving wildcats in Scotland, conservationists are looking at bringing them back to other parts of Britain. Devon Wildlife Trust is part of a project investigating the return of wildcats to Devon. It has the right mix of woodland

and open spaces, without too many roads that could be dangerous for wildcats. They've shown that there's space for wildcats and that many people would like to see them come back. There are also projects looking at bringing wildcats back to other areas, like Kielder Forest in Northumberland and parts of Wales. Hopefully it's not too long until wildcats can thrive across Britain again!

Wildcat kittens © David Shale / naturepl.com



© Peter Cairns / naturepl.com



Learn more at wtru.st/south-west-wildcats

SMOOTH NEWT



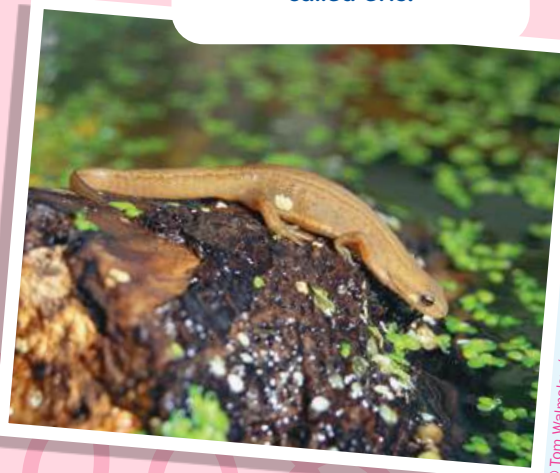
© Alan Price

COMMON NEWTS

There are three species of native newt in the UK: the smooth newt, the palmate newt and the great crested newt. The smooth newt is also known as the common newt, because it is found widely across the UK. It is the only native newt in Northern Ireland. If you have a garden pond, you might even have smooth newts living in it!

LAND LOVERS

We tend to think of newts as pond creatures. They are often seen in ponds in spring, when they're looking for a mate and somewhere to lay their eggs. Young newts even grow up underwater, munching on small insects and other tiny pond creatures. But once adult newts have laid their eggs, they often leave the water behind. In late summer and autumn, you can find them in woods and grassy places, usually hiding under logs and stones.



© Tom Wainwright / naturepl.com

Essential Facts

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Lissotriton vulgaris

SIZE

7-11 cm long

AMAZING FACT

Young newts are called efts.

AUTUMN APPETITE

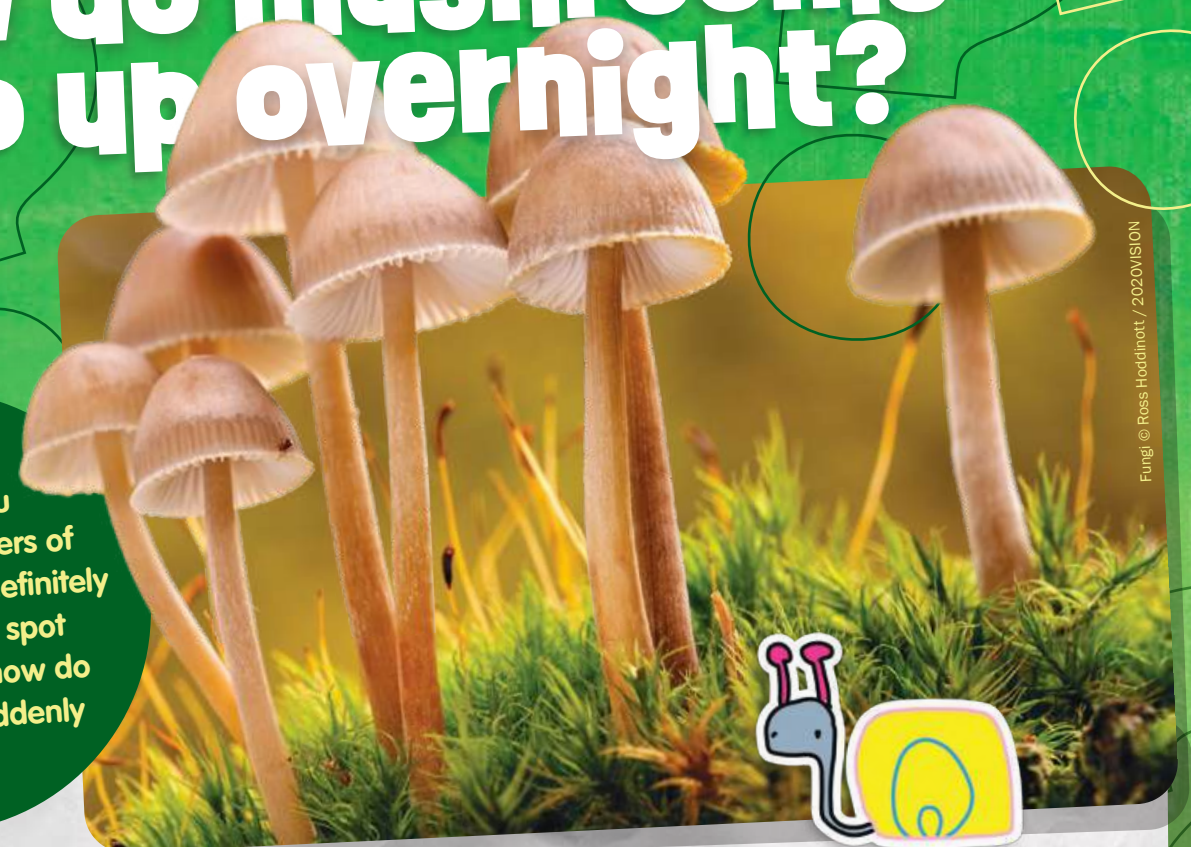
Autumn is an important time for smooth newts. Many of the young newts will now have grown legs and left the pond. Both these juvenile newts and the older adults need to find lots of food in autumn, to make sure they have enough energy to get through the winter. They roam around at night, hoovering up slugs, spiders and insects. Some young newts don't finish growing in time, so they stay in their pond for the winter and finish growing in spring.

WINTER RETREAT

Like frogs and toads, newts hide away over winter. They'll find a sheltered place, such as a compost heap or log pile. Their heart rate slows down and their body stops using as much energy and oxygen, so they can survive on the fat they've stored up in autumn. It's a little like hibernation in hedgehogs, but not as deep. Newts and other amphibians can become active again for a little while if the weather is mild enough, giving them a chance to eat and drink.

How do mushrooms pop up overnight?

Walking in autumn, you might spot clusters of mushrooms that definitely weren't in that spot yesterday! But how do mushrooms suddenly appear?



Fungi © Ross Hoddinott / 2020VISION

What is a mushroom?

Mushroom is one of the words we use to describe the fruiting body of a fungus. We might also call it a toadstool. It often has a stalk with a little cap on top, though mushrooms can come in lots of different shapes. The mushroom is usually the only part of a fungus we see. The rest of the fungus is hidden underground, inside a rotting log or in whatever else the mushroom is growing from. The rest of the fungus looks very different. It's a network of tiny threads called hyphae (pronounced hai-fee). Together, these threads form something called a mycelium (pronounced mai-see-lee-uhm), the main body of the fungus.

What does a mushroom do?

Think of a mushroom as being a bit like an apple on a tree. The rest of the fungus is the tree. When the weather is right, the fungus grows mushrooms above the ground. These mushrooms

have one job – to spread the fungus's spores, in the same way that an apple spreads a tree's seeds. Mushrooms can spread spores in lots of different ways. Some shoot spores into the air to drift on the wind, others rely on animals eating them and pooping them out somewhere else. These spores can then grow into new fungi.

But how do mushrooms grow so quickly?

Fungi have a nifty trick for popping up mushrooms in record speed. They do most of the building underground, out of sight. The fungi create the basic structure of their mushrooms in the soil or whatever else they're growing in. Then, when conditions are right, they absorb lots of water and use it to pump up the mushrooms. Some mushrooms can pump up fast enough to burst through tough surfaces like asphalt!

Scientists have calculated that stinkhorn mushrooms expand with so much force that three of them could lift 400 kilograms!

When do mushrooms appear?

Because fungi need lots of water to pump up their mushrooms, they often appear after it has rained. The mild, rainy weather we get in autumn provides the perfect conditions for lots of mushrooms, which is why this is such a great time of year to find them.

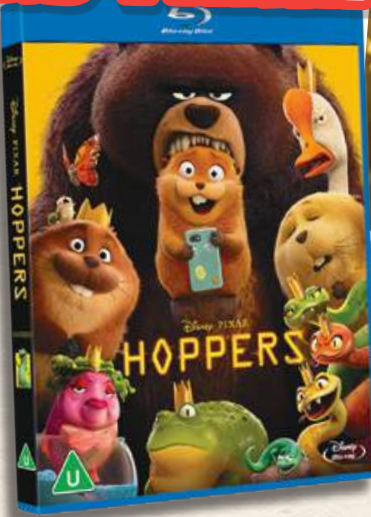


Common stinkhorn © Brian Eversham

Competitions

Win **DISNEY AND PIXAR'S HOPPERS**

Take a wildly fun adventure into the animal kingdom in the animated comedy film, Disney and Pixar's *Hoppers*! The film follows a human called Mabel as she hops her consciousness into a robotic beaver and communicates directly with animals. As she makes amazing discoveries, Mabel befriends a charismatic beaver and must rally the entire animal kingdom to face a major, imminent human threat.



We've got **FIVE** Blu-ray™ copies to give away!

Disney and Pixar's *Hoppers* is out now on 4K Ultra HD™ SteelBook, Blu-ray™ and DVD © 2026 DISNEY/PIXAR.

For your chance to win :

Just tell us what animal you would most like to talk to and why!

Win **THE FANTASTICAL SAFARI PUZZLE**



Step into a breath-taking world of wildlife in this spectacular 1000-piece puzzle, illustrated by award-winning artist Kristjana S Williams. Every piece brings you closer to completing a vibrant global safari, from icy polar shores to lush tropical rainforests. There are more than 60 amazing animals to discover! It includes a poster packed with facts about the animals you piece together.



We've got **FIVE** puzzles to give away!

RRP: £16.99 Buy online at quarto.com

For your chance to win :

How many species of native newt are there in the UK?
Clue: the answer is in the magazine.

Win **THE GRIMWOOD SERIES**

We're giving away complete sets of the Grimwood series, including the brand new sixth book, *The Fast and the Furriest*, thanks to our friends at Simon & Schuster. Join fox cub siblings Ted and Nancy as they explore Grimwood, the forest where anything can happen! There are riotous rabbits, dramatic ducks and many more weird and wonderful characters to discover.



We've got **FIVE** sets to give away!

Buy the books separately from all good bookshops.

For your chance to win :

Which of these is a nickname for the pike?

- The water wolf
- The fox fish
- The lake lynx

If you're sending multiple entries, please try to put them in one email to save energy!

Competition Rules

Send your entries to us by email watchcomps@wildlifetrusts.org or by post Wildlife Watch, The Kiln, Mather Road, Newark, Nottinghamshire NG24 1WT
Don't forget to include your name, age and a way of contacting you about your entry. DEADLINE: 30 November 2026

Competition entries may be used on our website and social media channels.