

ENGLISH NATURE
Magazine

Issue 75

September 2004



Access for all

Opening up our green spaces

A child's place

Why nature and play are an important combination

A walk on the farm

Challenging perceptions of farming and wildlife

Something to aim for

Finding new ways for people to connect with nature

English Nature is the statutory body which achieves, enables and promotes nature conservation in England.

We do so by working in partnership with individuals and a wide range of organisations including Government, representative bodies, agencies and voluntary organisations.

English Nature Magazine is published six times a year to promote nature conservation in England and make people aware of the latest developments. The views expressed in it by individuals are not necessarily those of English Nature.

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We operate a number of other offices across the country, from where our staff deal with local nature conservation issues.

Details of your nearest office can be obtained by phoning Northminster House, or by requesting a copy of English Nature Facts and Figures Information guide, free from the Enquiry Service at Northminster House, Tel 01733 455100.

You can also learn more about us via the Internet. Our address is:
www.english-nature.org.uk



Awarded for excellence

Cover picture



Cover photographer: Countryside Agency/Charlie Hedley

New access rights under the CROW Act give people the chance to see more of our green spaces (see page 4).

brief update

Funding supports friendly farming

Details of new funding arrangements, which will direct more money towards environment-friendly farming have been welcomed by English Nature.

The funding will enable the new agri-environment Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) scheme to be introduced across England in 2005.

The scheme will be available to all farmers and will be funded by holding back part of the new Single Farm Payment. The money will be matched by the Treasury.

"This is a progressive and highly welcome development," said Gareth Morgan, English Nature Agricultural

Policy Advisor. "The ELS secures significant environmental benefits and is geared towards the long term sustainability of farming – unlike the Single Farm Payment."

Farmers will be eligible for payment under ELS for management options such as looking after hedges and keeping overwinter stubbles for birds.

Christine Reid, Agri-environmental Policy Advisor with English Nature, said, "ELS rewards and encourages good practice by farmers and we hope to see a high take-up, which means the environmental benefits will be noticeable fairly quickly."

Integrated agency announced

In July, Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, announced the plans that draw on the findings of Lord Haskins' review of rural delivery. As part of these plans English Nature will become part of a single, integrated agency responsible for nature, landscape and access.

Under new legislation, a new organisation will merge English Nature with most of Defra's Rural Development Service, and some functions of the Countryside Agency.

Responding to the announcement, John Creedy, Corporate Governance Manager at English Nature, said, "This is really exciting news that gives

us the chance to create one powerful, independent, influential body.

"We're already jointly working on plans with Defra and people at the Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency. In future, we will be looking to build further on our good working relationships to create a new body that will be greater than the sum of its parts."

Dr Andy Brown, English Nature's Chief Executive, said, "The new agency will lead the way in delivering an accessible and high quality natural environment that is a fundamental cornerstone of our economic prosperity and the quality of life of individuals and communities."

Concerns over hen harrier breeding



Brood of hen harriers

Derek Ratcliffe/English Nature

England's most endangered bird of prey, the hen harrier, has maintained its breeding levels of last year according to the latest figures from English Nature.

However, concerns have been raised that nesting attempts were restricted to just one area as birds didn't return to a number of nesting sites where illegal persecution took place last year.

All this year's breeding took place at Bowlands Farm in Lancashire where eight out of 10 nesting attempts were successful, resulting in 28 young.

"Despite the success at Bowlands Farm, the total number of nesting attempts in

the UK is still down significantly," said Richard Saunders, Hen Harrier Project Officer with English Nature.

"Illegal persecution has caused a decline in the number of breeding sites from six last year to a single one this year. It is worrying to be dependent on just this one site."

English Nature has been focusing attention on the plight of the hen harrier through its Hen Harrier Recovery Project. It will meet with a wide range of organisations this month, including landowners, to look at ways of conserving the bird's future.

SSSI Award



Raffy Ponsillo

Special mention must go to Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Award winner Raffy (Raffaele) Ponsillo who wasn't featured among the other winners in the last edition. Raffy's farm falls partially within the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area and Tealham and Tadham Moors SSSI. Here he farms dairy and beef cattle while still being able to manage the wet grasslands for wildlife.



Editorial

The September issue of English Nature is mostly about access. From this month, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 is granting right of access to key areas of open country and registered common land, as part of a rolling programme that will cover the whole of England and Wales by the end of 2005.

We welcome the opportunity this increased access gives people to visit and appreciate the countryside. For many people, the English countryside is a treasured asset, a peaceful and beautiful place to escape the stresses of modern life. It can also be a fragile place, where rare and precious plants and animals live in careful co-dependence with the environment immediately around them. Yet only through knowing and seeing wild places can people truly appreciate and value them. On even the most sensitive sites, access can usually be planned and managed in a way that makes sure wildlife is protected. So we must hope that by encouraging people to get out and enjoy the countryside, we are actually doing it a favour.

Access will mean different things in different places. In the Pennines, thousands of hectares of moorland will open to the public for the first time, while in the South Downs, much of which is already open access, few new visitors are expected (see pages 6 and 7). Read about Sutton Mill Farm (page 10-11), the River Parrett Trail (page 12) and the Hawk and Owl Trust (page 13) for inspirational examples of how people can be encouraged to enjoy a special site at the same time as looking after its wildlife.

As always, I would love to hear from you. Please get in touch with your comments, ideas or views.

Amanda Giles

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Although English Nature magazine does not have a regular letters page, I am always interested in receiving feedback about the magazine, or letters on subjects that may be of interest to our readers. If there is a subject that you feel would be relevant to our readership, please write to me or email me, and I will certainly consider publishing your letter in the magazine.

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If this copy of English Nature magazine is not your own, and you would like to go on our mailing list to receive the magazine regularly, please contact Alison Eley, IMT, English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA.

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From this month legislation giving walkers a new right of access to some of our most attractive landscapes begins to take effect. 958,000 hectares of England have been mapped allowing access where people won't have to keep to paths. It's an opportunity to enjoy more of what our countryside has to offer while being equally aware of the need to protect it.

Access to the countryside

Open country on the North Lees Estate in the Peak District

Paul Glendell/English Nature

A dog walker at Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes SSSI



For many people, the English countryside is an important part of our national identity. It's also a place to escape our urban areas and the pressures of modern life. Little wonder then that walkers and walking groups have for many years campaigned for the right to wander freely across it.

Now the Government's Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 is granting much of that freedom: the right of access to many areas of open country and registered common land in England and Wales. It is introducing these rights on a region by region basis, beginning in England with the Lower North West and South East on 19 September followed by six other regions between now and the end of 2005.

"In the great majority of cases, access and nature conservation are compatible. Provided that there is appropriate management these

interests can be reconciled, enabling people to explore special areas without compromising the natural heritage they value, or the land-use practices on which they depend," said Graham Bathe, English Nature's Access and Commonland Projects Manager. "The key to this is careful planning. Through the careful siting of entry points, use of signs and information, and subtle management of vegetation, it is usually possible to influence where people want to go. This of course requires resources, and we are working with partner bodies concerning the Access Management Grant Scheme, funding work to ensure that wildlife can continue to flourish alongside public access. People enjoy the countryside for a variety of reasons, but we know that the appreciation of wildlife, and the sights and sounds of nature, greatly add to the experience.

"More than half the land affected falls within Sites of Special Scientific Interest and around 70 per cent of these already enjoy some form of access."

"The new right of access is the culmination of a long campaign for freedom to roam on open country. It means a great deal to people to be able to wander where they will – a physical and psychological freedom."

Kate Ashbrook, General Secretary, Open Spaces Society

There are only a few cases where it hasn't been possible to reconcile the needs of wildlife and public access. Most of these relate to the presence of rare ground nesting birds, which could be disturbed by unwary walkers or dogs. In such cases some level of restriction will be needed. Normally, however, it will be enough to keep dogs on a short lead during the main breeding season.

Informing people where they can go is vital. The Countryside Agency has

developed a new symbol which can be used to indicate access land on the ground and has undertaken a high-profile awareness campaign focused around its countryside access website (www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk). The Ordnance Survey is also marking access land on all new Explorer maps, which are being published to coincide with the roll-out of the rights to each region.

"We should all celebrate the rich diversity of landscapes and habitats in England, and encourage all those exercising their new freedom to roam to appreciate and enjoy these," said Kate Ashbrook, General Secretary of the Open Spaces Society. "This freedom will bring people closer to the natural world and will encourage them to get involved and campaign to protect it – which is in all our interests."

Our green spaces can also be accessed in ways other than a day's free wandering: a long walk with a National Nature Reserve as its goal; a panoramic view from a 30 foot tower hide or a meandering boardwalk purposely built to take you in amongst a fen and its wildlife. These are just some of the stories that you will find on the following pages.

The new right of open access in England

The new right applies to 'access land' – usually registered commons and open country: mountain, moor, heath and down. In some parts of England, such as the Lower North West, this will open up new swathes of countryside previously inaccessible to the public. In others, such as the South East, lots of accessible land already exists, so people will be encouraged to get out and enjoy it.

South East	19 September 2004
Lower North West	19 September 2004
Central Southern England	December 2004
Upper North West	May 2005
North East	May 2005
South West	August 2005
West	October 2005
East	November 2005

The new Countryside Code

Greater access to the countryside carries with it great responsibility on the part of walkers and other users. The Countryside Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales worked with organisations like English Nature to review the Countryside Code, taking account of changes over the last 20 years. Walkers are now asked to:

- be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs;
- leave gates and property as you find them;
- protect plants and animals, and take your litter home;
- keep dogs under close control;
- consider other people.

The full Code, which includes tips and advice for countryside visitors and land managers, can be found on the website www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk or from tourist information and visitor centres, and many outdoor shops.

Wider and better quality access



Much of the obtrusive fencing has now been removed from Kingley Vale NNR
Julian Bateson/English Nature

A better quality of access

The introduction of new access rights is not expected to deliver many more visitors to Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve (NNR), near Chichester. Like much of the South Downs, there is already open access to most of its 150 hectares.

The NNR already attracts in excess of 30,000 visitors each year as this is one of the most important archaeological sites in southern England, with ancient monuments, including Bronze Age burial mounds and Celtic field boundaries. It also encloses the finest remaining yew forest in Europe and many of its visitors are on repeat trips to enjoy its unique features.

For Reserve Manager, Simon Nobes, the role of the Act here then is not so much to promote wider access, but to improve the quality of access already in place, thus making the visitor 'experience' that bit better.

The most noticeable change is the resurfaced track, which takes visitors to the Reserve's main entrance. "In the past this was simply a rutted farm track, but we have now been able to give it a surface that can be used by people in wheelchairs. Once you are inside there are some slopes that are still a problem, but a wheelchair visitor can certainly now see most of Kingley Vale's key features," said Simon.

Access has also been improved through the replacement of stiles with easy-to-use gates. Inside the NNR, work has concentrated on removing old fences so that visitors really can roam free.

Simon added, "We had fences around the Reserve that were redundant, left over from an earlier grazing regime. Under a new system of management the sheep graze more freely within a perimeter fence and so we were able to take those old fences out."

Peter Wakeley/English Nature



A 750-year-old ancient yew at Kingley Vale NNR

Now visitors can also go wherever they please – although that does not necessarily mean that they do. "I think it is taking people time to get used to the freedom. Many seem to prefer to be guided, so they stick to the waymarked nature trail, but as they get used to the place they do begin to explore a little further," continued Simon.

Derek Ratcliffe/English Nature



Dogs can worry ground-nesting birds, such as the golden plover, from their nests. The eggs are then prey to other birds.

With access comes responsibility

The South Pennines have been the focus of much of the debate about wider public access to open countryside over the years. This hill country, centred at the base of England's spine, is a valued asset to the towns and cities of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Derbyshire.

Paul Glendell/English Nature



South Pennines Moorland

The opening of more of this area to the public in September will be a significant move for walkers in the region. David Slater, English Nature's Conservation Officer here, has played a key role in preparing the area for the change. He said, "Places like Kinder Scout, where the mass trespass protests took place in the 1930s, have powerful symbolism for the open access movement."

Much of this land is also recognised internationally for its importance to wildlife. Sandwiched between Ilkley in the north and Leek and Matlock in the south, the South Pennine Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) amounts to 66,000 hectares of grass and heather moor. As such, it is a prime breeding habitat for ground-nesting birds and is also designated a Special Protection Area (SPA) under European legislation.

"The South Pennines is protected for its populations of birds like the golden plover, short-eared owl and merlin," added David. "As ground-nesting species, they can be easily disturbed by people, especially those walking dogs."

This is where there is a potential problem. The assessment is that the total numbers of people walking the moors will not increase much given the new access, but that people taking dogs into newly opened areas is a potential cause for concern. Ground-nesting birds will fly to safety when a dog is close, leaving their nest unprotected. Then predators like crows can take eggs and chicks can wander.

Working closely with the Countryside Agency and 14 local authorities, English Nature has come up with an approach that should benefit all interests. Rather than closing off areas to protect ground-nesting birds, the partners have opted instead to persuade owners to keep their dogs on leads during spring and early summer.

That message will be put over to the public by well-placed signage and through a wider publicity campaign. David Slater is optimistic that the message will be well received. "When you explain to people the way that birds react to a dog being around, they see how important it is. People accept why they are being asked to take care."



Children pool dipping in Wembury, Plymouth

Making space for children

Peter Wakeley/English Nature

Stewart Turkington



Stills from the Child's Place video showing children from the different schools surveyed

Less and less access to green space means our children are becoming increasingly disconnected from nature. A new report seeks to put their views at the heart of policy for the future.

Most of us can remember growing up as a time of play and adventure running around out of doors, climbing trees, discovering wildlife, shouting and chasing, letting our imaginations run wild. And today it's an inspiring sight to see children do just this. But sadly it's one that's becoming increasingly rare.

According to the report *A child's place: why environment matters to children*, fear and risk, lack of investment, overcrowding and poverty, in particular, are all restricting children's opportunities to spend time outside.

"The numbers of children walking to school are dropping dramatically," said Sharon Gunn, English Nature's People and Nature Manager. "Child obesity is on the increase, child depression and other stress-related illnesses are more common and fewer and fewer schools are organising out-of-school trips. For many children, access to green space is not safe or even possible."

Active play is essential to children's physical health and personal development. It therefore follows that less access to open public or 'green' space is cause for concern. "If we want this generation and future generations to grow up with a sense of wonder and delight, a sense of ownership and responsibility for their local environment, we must listen and we must act," said Sharon.

It was with this in mind that the report, and the video that accompanied it, was compiled by environmental charity Green Alliance and green think-tank Demos with support from Barnardo's, English Nature, Ikea and Royal Bank of Scotland. All felt that environmental policy-makers could benefit greatly by listening more to children's views on their local environment. Based on interviews with 10 and 11-year-olds from a mix of urban/rural and ethnic backgrounds, the report highlights several important findings (see box), perhaps key of which is the inequality of access to green space.

"Poor children are far more likely to live in poor environments with limited access to open spaces," said Di McNeish, Director of Policy & Research at children's charity Barnardo's. "And whilst lobbyists on child poverty are legitimately concerned with low family incomes and material deprivation, far less attention is paid to environmental poverty and its impact on children. It is time for children's access to safe public space to be recognised as a policy priority."

The report makes a number of specific recommendations. One is that local volunteering bureaux should run city garden share schemes for disadvantaged children. Another is that the Department for Education and Skills should extend rural-urban school twinning schemes. English Nature has already established standards that, if applied, should ensure that no child has to live further than 300 metres from accessible green space.

It is now for Government and all organisations with a stake in the future of children, conservation, health and urban planning to pick up these threads and develop a practical way forward for all our futures.

You can download a PDF version of this report by visiting the website www.greenalliance.org.uk

To see the accompanying video of children discussing the issues raised visit: www.demos.co.uk/catalogue/achildsplacevideo/

"we want this and future generations to grow up with a sense of wonder and delight, a sense of ownership and responsibility for their local environment"

Sharon Gunn, English Nature's People and Nature Manager

'English Nature has already established standards that, if applied, should ensure that no child has to live further than 300 metres from accessible green space.'

Key recommendations from *A child's place: why environment matters to children*

- Environmental education through exploration:

We need to provide for children's innate sense of exploration and self-discovery through out-of-school learning and greening school design.

- Participation in decision-making:

Children's voices should be heard early on in the design and maintenance of public space through regeneration strategies and land-use planning.

- Protecting children's spaces:

The links between environmental policy and children's well-being must be embedded into national policy to ensure delivery at local level.

- Spatial inequality:

Public policy needs to address the problem that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have fewer opportunities to access safe, clean public space.

- Health and well-being:

The links between children's health and environmental problems need to be recognised at the national policy level and, through strategic partnerships, at local level.

Key findings:

- There is a big gap in equality of access to high quality natural environments between children from rural backgrounds and children from urban backgrounds.
- Children have a strong sense of the environment as a social space and this influences the way they use public space for outdoor play and personal development.
- Assessing danger is children's top priority when thinking about different environments.
- Many children have a surprisingly good grasp of environmental issues, but gain their most powerful understanding through exploration of their own natural environment.

A walk on the farm

Unfriendly to people, indifferent to wildlife. This is the negative stereotype that many farmers have struggled against. But some are seeking to change perceptions through farm walks that will show people how things really are.

“Off my land!” This is just one of many unfair clichés that farmers like Richard Cotham, of Sutton Mill Farm in Claverley, Shropshire are keen to dismiss.

“People just don’t understand what’s going on in the countryside anymore,” said Richard. “They’ve become divorced from it. In fact, it’s been a couple of generations since there was a real connection between society and the countryside. That’s why it’s important to get people on to farms to engage with the countryside and see how conservation and business can work hand in hand.”

Richard and his father before him have been leading tours of Sutton Mill Farm for almost

two decades. Word of mouth has ensured a regular flow of visitors over the years, from local school and scout groups, to other farmers looking for conservation ideas, naturalists and curious members of the public.

Coming runner-up in last year’s English Nature-sponsored Farming for Wildlife Awards, part of the NFU Farming Excellence Awards, has also helped raise the profile of the Sutton Mill farm, its walks and conservation work.

Richard leads a tour of Sutton Mill three or four times each year with up to 20 or 30 visitors on each tour. The goal is to show what’s involved in running a commercial farm and how this can be combined with practices that encourage wildlife. Much of each two to three hour tour is taken up with questions.

“It’s a real education for visitors,” says Richard. “First of all I explain the size of the farm and the various enterprises here. I then show them how conservation fits in.

“A good example is the network of beetle banks on the farm. These raised soil banks, sown with cocksfoot and clover, divide large arable blocks and provide an undisturbed habitat, which invertebrates can also use as an avenue between fields.

Encouraging predatory insects, such as ladybirds, hoverflies and lace wings, reduces the number of arable invertebrate pests. This means that I can reduce the amount of pesticide I use.

“The beetle banks also provide a rich food-source for small rodents, such as field mice. Left to themselves they would also eat my sugar beet seed. But by including raptor posts on the beetle banks at regular intervals, I’ve been able to encourage barn owls and other predatory birds into the arable block. This increases their hunting territory along the beetle banks and gets rid of my seed-eating rodent problem.”

Hedge-coppicing perfectly illustrates how a lack of public understanding can reinforce negative stereotypes of the farming community.

“I had a large, roadside elm hedge at risk of developing Dutch elm disease three years ago. I coppiced it to ground level. I received a few adverse comments from local people about how farmers are desiccating the countryside. A neighbouring landowner did nothing to his side of the hedge,” explained Richard.

“Three years later, our side has re-grown into a healthy eight-foot tall hedge

while the other side is now nothing but dead sticks. This is why it’s important to talk to people and explain how what may look like a drastic action can have long term benefits.”

A regular visitor to Sutton Mill is Tom Bunce, a scout leader at Wall Heath near Dudley, who has been taking groups of scouts to camp at the farm for more than two decades.

“We’re a village group situated right on the edge of an urban area so it’s great to get into the countryside. We have our training camp at the farm each year with around 20 scouts camping there.

“Being on the farm is a great way for the group to really get off the beaten track and see wildlife and countryside they wouldn’t normally see.

“As a thank you, we offer our services for conservation work on the farm. This has included making and affixing bird and bat boxes, removing stray branches to open up woodland for birds and animals, and clearing debris from a fish pool. And whenever I advertise these jobs to the lads, there’s never a shortage of takers.”



Raptor posts encourage predatory birds



A local scout group visits Sutton Mill



Word of mouth has ensured a regular flow of visitors to Sutton Mill

Richard Cotham

Richard Cotham

Tom Bunce

Richard Cotham

Something to aim for

Peter Wakeley/English Nature



Good access to green space isn't just about rights of way. It is about finding new ways through which people can connect with nature.

The River Parrett Trail winds 50 miles from its source at Chedington on the hills of the north Dorset border, to Stert Point on the Severn Estuary. In between, it passes through the hills of the Dorset border and across the Somerset Levels. It is a popular route, offering short circular walks for day visitors as well as the full stretch for the more adventurous.

And as with the best walks, it ends or begins on a suitably impressive note. Celebrating its 50th anniversary as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) this year, Bridgwater Bay NNR contains one of England's largest areas of saltmarsh, supporting large numbers of waterfowl and wading birds, such as shelduck, curlew and oystercatcher. This part of the Somerset coast is also rich in fossils and boasts submarine forest remains, only visible at low tide.

There is much to draw the visitor, but the NNR's relationship with the Trail adds an important new dimension to its appeal.

"People tend to walk the trail from source to mouth and the NNR is a pay-off for all that effort," said English Nature Site Manager, Robin Prowse. "We wanted to build on that feeling and create a real beacon for visitors, something to aim for that would celebrate the walk and the NNR, but also offer rest and shelter."

That something is a 30 foot tower hide providing panoramic views of the surrounding countryside including the Somerset Levels and Glastonbury Tor. A joint project between English Nature and the Parrett Trail Partnership, representing a range of local and regional partners, it provides a different and dramatic perspective on the NNR and local environment.

"While there is open access along most of the NNR's seven mile stretch of coast," added Robin, "some areas can be treacherous on foot or are sensitive because of the waterfowl. By using the hide, visitors can still appreciate these areas without putting themselves or the wildlife at risk."

Robin Prowse/English Nature



Top: The mudflats seen from the hide
Below: The tower hide

Improving access to the Trail

The River Parrett Trail is an important regional walking route and the result of many partnerships between local people, business, landowners and other organisations. As such it seeks to serve and involve these communities by, for example, commissioning local craftspeople and artists to create bridges, gates and works of art along its length.

Now thanks to new EU funding from the Somerset Levels and Moors LEADER + Programme and support from partners, access along the route is to be improved. "We've already upgraded access in many places by replacing stiles," said Kate Jenkins, River Parrett Trail Officer. "By assessing the route and developing an Access Improvement Plan, we will be able to see where resources should be focused to open up the trail further." Other projects include creating eight circular walks to better link the trail with local communities.

Sedge beds at Sculthorpe Moor

A Norfolk wetland with a long history of community use has been returned to locals as a nature reserve that everyone can enjoy.

Nigel Middleton

A place for people and nature

Paul Glendell/English Nature



Nigel Middleton on the boardwalk

The new boardwalk at Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature Reserve takes a rather meandering route through the site's patchwork of river fen and wet woodland, bordering the River Wensum near Fakenham, Norfolk. It has become something of a talking point, according to Reserve Manager Nigel Middleton.

"It has been said that I was a bit tipsy when I marked it out," he joked. "In fact, when we planned where it was to go, we chose to follow deer tracks as far as possible because they stuck to the drier ground."

The 700 metres of boardwalk have once again made accessible what has

scrub slowly invaded. With the valley fen all but lost, locals stopped visiting and the hen harriers, which had long used the habitat as a winter roost, moved on.

It was at this point that the Hawk and Owl Trust took a real interest. Keen to establish its first reserve, it began discussions with Sculthorpe Parish Council that led to a 25-year lease on the 17-hectare site. Following an agreement with English Nature, the Trust is now restoring the habitat to something of its former glory and with it the role of community space. Nigel added, "We want to give the moor back to the local community to use as a resource for peace and for recreation."

long been a community resource. The site was given to the local parish 150 years ago specifically for community use and has traditionally been cut for its peat. During most of the last century, however, it was let for shooting and

The first phase of improvements included building the boardwalk as well as putting up a hide and toilets. The work was funded largely by a £25,000 grant from the Countryside Agency's Local Heritage Initiative. Now the all-abilities walk allows visitors to wind their way through the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) without getting their feet wet. Indeed, this was just one factor that inspired English Nature to present the Trust with one of its People and Nature SSSI Awards.

The Trust is now applying for grants to pay for the next phase of work, which will include more boardwalk, a tower hide and an education centre.

If the site's beds of saw sedge can be fully restored, there is a hope that hen harriers will also return. In the meantime, the goal of once again making this a space that benefits local people is close to becoming reality. One of the project's keenest supporters is Tony Walters, Chairman of Sculthorpe Parish Council. He said, "I've been surprised with the number of people who go for walk there now. We're not all wildlife experts you understand, but we'll learn – and it's a lovely, peaceful place we enjoy."

Use or abuse?

When access to green space is abused, it can spoil things for everyone, wildlife included. By controlling access under the Wildspace! Grant Scheme, Maltby Commons and Bovey Heathfield Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are once again places to enjoy.



Bovey Heathfield clean up operation, top, and aerial shot, below

Bovey Heathfield LNR

Bovey Heathfield LNR is tucked away behind warehouses at the end of an industrial estate in Bovey Heathfield, Devon. The site has SSSI status for its lowland heath habitat and hosts one of the few colonies of the rare narrow-headed ant. It is also the site of a Civil War battlefield, complete with a bank and ditch system which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

In recent years the site has become known by 4x4 drivers and scramble bikers throughout the South West as a prime venue for off-road, illegal fun. Scramble bikers would come from as far as Bristol to tear across the heath, and the site

has suffered badly from the extreme misuse.

In 2002, Devon Wildlife Trust received an English Nature Wildspace! grant, supported by the Big Lottery Fund, to employ a Community Liaison Officer. Their role was to address the issues of anti-social use at Bovey Heathfield, declare the site as an LNR, encourage positive use of the site by local people and ultimately restore the habitat to thriving lowland heath.

A massive clean-up effort, during which 20 tons of rubbish was removed, began the restoration process. The presence of the officer and

volunteer rangers to warn motorcyclists and 4x4 drivers of their illegal activities, strengthened by threats of legal action and the installation of fences and barriers, has been extremely successful in deterring anti-social use. The site is now an LNR and public access is actively encouraged.

Reversing the trend of habitat degradation and increasing appropriate use of the site is a longer term process, but positive signs are beginning to emerge: regular dog walkers visit the site, areas of heath are showing signs of recovery and local people are aware of the project and keen to give their support.

Maltby Commons LNR

Maltby Commons LNR lies one kilometre east of Maltby, Rotherham. The site is managed by the Maltby Commons LNR Management Committee, a partnership between the landowner, the Earl of Scarborough's Sandbeck Estate, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Maltby Town Council, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and English Nature. The Commons cover 40 hectares, half of which is registered common land, and two public rights of way cross the site.

Despite open access to the public, a large area for parking cars and the proximity of

the commons to the town, local people were deterred until recently from using the site because of severe anti-social use including joyriding, fly-tipping and arson. They felt uneasy and intimidated, the piles of rubbish and burnt-out cars acting as a strong deterrent to visitors.

In 2001, the Management Committee applied for an English Nature Wildspace! grant, supported by the Big Lottery Fund, to transform the site into a safe and attractive natural resource for people and wildlife. The project was also financially supported by a grant from Waste Recycling Environmental

Ltd and Lord Scarborough. In the previous 12 months 40 abandoned and burnt-out vehicles were removed from the site along with 20 van loads of household and garden refuse and builders' rubbish. The success of the whole project was felt to be dependent upon the prevention of vehicular access onto the LNR.

This was achieved, with dramatic success, by installing huge limestone boulders along the LNR boundary. Gates and barriers enable access on foot, access tracks have been improved and a designated car-parking area has been created.



Limestone boulders, below, help prevent joyriding at Maltby Commons

LETTERS

Dear Ms Giles,

Having spent more than ten years studying the biology of deer at Aberdeen University I was amused to read that Anne Kelaart (May, 2004) has a problem with fallow deer eating her roses, though her lack of understanding of deer can best be regarded as alarming. The scientific research shows that the 'management' of large wild herbivores by human intervention does not really work.

Fallow deer live in groups and in the English Midlands problems have arisen as the pressure on countryside land for urbanisation and road building has led to an 'artificial' confinement of these groups. This leads to a loss of genetic integrity in the herd. So we have a situation where human activity is causing harm to a species. You cannot just say reduce their numbers by shooting them. How does one know which deer are genetically OK and which ones have recessive genetics, run a DNA profile on every deer?

As Anne will know, many hill sheep 'heft', that is live in the same area that their ancestors did. I once remember a 'hefted' flock being sold at market in the Lake District and a few days later the flock was seen wandering down Kendal High Street on their way back home, decimating a few gardens on route of course. Fallow deer herds have created their own natural boundaries over generations; so it is hardly surprising that in exploring those boundaries they end up in someone's back garden.

Sincerely,
Dr Roger Lambert, MSc PhD
CBiol Chartered Biologist

WHAT'S ON? GUIDE

SEPTEMBER

SEP
26

Autumn Bird Walk

9.00, Rimal Car Park, Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes NNR, Lincolnshire

This is a great opportunity for children and grown-ups to discover the joys of bird-watching at this colourful time of the year.

Contact: 01326 240808

OCTOBER

OCT
9

Come outdoors and draw!

1.30, Ham Street Woods NNR, Kent
Would you like to draw and paint outside but feel vulnerable on your own? Then why not join English Nature staff who will help you discover some beautiful parts of Hamstreet Woods in safety.

Contact Abbi Bamping or Becky Sapsford on 01233 812525

OCT
24

Peatlands for People

2.00, the new car park by the Old Peat Works, South Solway Mosses NNR, Cumbria

English Nature will have carried out substantial peatland restoration works on the old peat cuttings and is inviting people to come and have a look at this internationally important peat bog.

Contact: Frank Mawby on 016973 50005

OCT
30

Halloween in the Woods Evening Event

6.30, Castle Eden Dene NNR, Oakerside Dene Lodge, Durham

You'll need to book early for this Halloween event as demand always exceeds the places available. Spooky tales in the dark wood followed by a pie and peas supper are the order of the day. There'll also be prizes for the best costume and lantern. Advance booking only.

Contact: Nick Haigh or Steve Metcalfe on 0191 518 2403

For information on more events, visit:
www.english-nature.org.uk/events.asp

BARS ready to go live

A new system of managing and reporting the progress of Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) is being introduced this autumn. It will not only be an invaluable resource for individual organisations, but will also enable plans to be coordinated nationwide.

More than 1,500 organisations are currently involved in BAP activity and between them they generate a huge amount of information.

The Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) is a new web-based information system that will support the planning, monitoring and reporting requirements of national and local BAPs.

BARS is targeted at lead partners, local BAP (LBAP) coordinators and other organisations and agencies involved in the delivery of plans. It will enable users to enter action plans, record progress towards targets and actions, and generate sophisticated reports.

“Having so many organisations carrying out BAP work is brilliant, but it also creates a real challenge when it comes to assessing what all these bodies are achieving,” said Peter Brotherton, Head of English Nature Biodiversity Unit.

“BARS will standardise how BAP information is recorded, offering people scroll-down menus and numeric fields so that data are not just gathered as text.”

“This will create a wealth of information showing exactly what

BAP activity is underway in different areas and what it is achieving.”

BARS should also prove a valuable tool for helping LBAP partnerships work more effectively. It should improve communication and promote closer working between local and national BAPs and, spread good practice. It will also give public access to the BAP work being done in a given area.

The system will be free to the BAP community. There will be an online help guide and training workshops will be run.

“Over time, we will be developing links to other information systems concerned with nature and wildlife,” added Peter, “such as the National Biodiversity Network and, indeed, English Nature’s own website.

“Combining all these resources will enable us to see the distribution of species, their habitats, protected sites and conservation actions underway. Taken together, this information will help us all make better conservation decisions.”

For more information visit www.ukbap.org.uk/Library/BarsInfoNoteMarch2004.pdf



The ballerina wax cup is one BAP species on which data is being managed through BARS

Liz Biron is the Survey Manager at the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) where BARS has been piloted this year.

“We’ve been using the stand-alone version of BARS prior to the national roll-out of the web-based version this year,” said Liz. “It has proved a really useful tool in carrying out an LBAP review in Somerset and re-writing our LBAPs in accordance with the latest national guidelines. It is a powerful tool for information management and has allowed us to work with all of Somerset’s seven LBAPs in a linked way.

“I have also been training people in the district to use BARS. I’ve really enjoyed using it and the feedback I’ve had during training has been very positive. People have taken readily to the easy-to-use system and have been able to appreciate the benefits it will bring.”