ENGLISH NATURE

ENGLISH NATURE Magazine

Issue 85 July 2006

A time for change

Caring for nature – past and future

Natural England
Examining the role of the new body

The bigger picture
Conservation on a landscape scale

Seaside special
Coastal hotspots to visit this summer

brief update
Issue 85 July 2006

In this issue

Natural England

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

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

ENGLISH NATURE

Rural Development Service

The Countryside Agency
Landscape Access Recreation

Cover picture by Paul Naylor

Nudibranch sea slug *Coryphella browni* in Plymouth Sound
This slow, soft-bodied creature defends itself using ingested stinging cells passed through its digestive system to the tips of the projections on its back. Find out more at **www.marinephoto.co.uk**

No Take Zones **Pg 21**

The first issue of the new magazine for Natural England will be published in October 2006.
If you have any views or comments on what you would like to see in this magazine, please contact **Amanda Giles, at English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA, or at amanda.giles@english-nature.org.uk**

If you would like to add or remove your name from the mailing list for the new magazine, or add a friend's name, please contact Alison Eley, IMT, English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA or email: **alison.eley@english-nature.org.uk**

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Written, designed & printed by: Corporate Document Services, 7 Eastgate, Leeds LS2 7LY **www.cds.co.uk** on Evolution Satin (75% recycled post-consumer waste paper, elemental chlorine-free bleached), 17M.

A clear winner

An initiative to improve the water quality of Norfolk's Barton Broad won the Natural Environment Category in this year's Waterways Renaissance Awards.

The Barton Broads Clear Water Project used innovative waterway conservation techniques to improve the quality of the second largest of the Norfolk broads. The project created floating islands and enclosed lagoons and put in fish-proof curtains to stop fish from devouring water fleas called daphnia, which eat the algae responsible for muddying the water. Recent work carried out under the Lake Restoration Project led by English Nature, built on this success.

Broads Authority

The solar-powered passenger boat, Ra, cruises along the broad

Suction dredging removed 300,000 cubic metres of nutrient-rich mud from the bed of the broad, so reducing the release of phosphorus which causes algal growth. This encouraged the return of traditional plants and desirable fish like perch which prey on the smaller species responsible for eating the daphnia. Dredging also improved navigation for boaters by deepening, widening and clearing heavily-silted channels in the water.

A boardwalk was built to improve access from the shore and the Broads Authority launched the country's first wheelchair-accessible solar-powered passenger boat called Ra (named after the Egyptian sun god).

English Nature Chief Executive, Dr Andy Brown, said, "The results speak for themselves – clearer water, more aquatic plants, otters and kingfishers."

The project is also supported by the Millennium Commission, East of England Development Agency, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Anglian Water, the Environment Agency and Norfolk Environmental Waste Services.

The Waterways Renaissance Awards are held annually by The Waterways Trust and the British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA) to recognise projects which improve and enhance the UK's rivers and canals. English Nature sponsors the Natural Environment category.

Red kites' return
Birds are a symbol of region's rebirth 16–17

Trading places
Why French job-swap is a 'pique nique' 26–29

Wilde-life gardening
Tips from green-fingered pop star Kim Wilde 32

Baby bird bonanza

John Beatty/wild-vision.com

One of the hen harrier chicks is wing-tagged

This year's breeding season brought a series of good news stories for some of England's most spectacular birds.

Red Kite chicks have hatched in the North East for the first time in nearly 200 years. The Northern Kites Project, set up to restore a breeding population of the birds to the region, has reported at least two chicks in a nest in Gateshead's Lower Derwent Valley.

Five hen harrier chicks have hatched on National Trust moorland in the Peak District – despite the disappearance of their father in early June. This is only the second family of hen harriers born in the Peak District in the last 130 years. As the male provides food, it is unusual for a single mum to persevere alone but the babies appear to be healthy. The birds have been watched around the clock by a team supported by the National Trust, English Nature, the RSPB and the shooting tenant.

The RSPB has reported signs of Manx shearwater on Lundy Island, off the north Devon coast, for the first time since the removal of black rats in 2003. The rats, which eat eggs and chicks, were eradicated by the Seabird Recovery Project, a partnership between English Nature, the National Trust, the Landmark Trust and the RSPB, so that the birds could breed. Monitoring of burrows has revealed nests with signs of shearwaters this year and a puffin chick was seen last year.

Northern Kites' rebirth see pages 16–17

Tributes to a man of science

A memorial was unveiled in June to Dr Derek Almey Ratcliffe, one of the 20th century's most outstanding and influential nature conservationists.

Dr Ratcliffe was a renowned ecologist and former Chief Scientist of the Nature Conservancy Council from 1973 until his retirement in 1989. He was an authority on mountain and peatland ecology, birds and plants and wrote many significant books. He led research in the 1960s which highlighted the connection between the now notorious pesticide DDT and a severe decline in raptors, especially the peregrine falcon.

His widow, Jeanette, unveiled a memorial stone and a carved bench at English Nature's Finglandrigg National Nature Reserve at Kirkbampton near Carlisle, one of Dr Ratcliffe's favourite spots. The ceremony was hosted by English Nature's Chief Executive, Dr Andy Brown, with tributes paid by friends and former colleagues.

English Nature North Cumbria NNR Team

Jeanette Ratcliffe unveils the memorial

Editorial

This is the last issue of English Nature magazine. While I'm sorry to say goodbye to the old, I'm excited by the prospect of the new. We are working on a new magazine called *Natural England*, and the first issue will be published in October. *Natural England* promises to be an interesting, honest and lively read. It will cover a wide range of issues, from wildlife and countryside management, rural enterprise and climate change to urban greening, sustainable travel and green holidays. There will be a mix of regular features and guest columns, with some light-hearted fun mixed in amongst the serious. Unless we hear from you, you will automatically be transferred to the new mailing list. So please – watch this space.

In the meantime, this is a special celebratory issue with which to say farewell to English Nature. On pages 8 to 15, Andy Brown, our Chief Executive, looks back at some of the organisation's most notable successes, from buying out the peat-digging rights on Thorne and Hatfield Moors in 2001, to the return of the Red Kite under the Species Recovery Programme, the management of over 40,000 hectares of heathland through the Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage programme, and victory at Dibden Bay in 2004. While these are all remarkable successes in their own right, they are even more important in being indicative of a steady and significant change in mindsets everywhere. Nature conservation is truly and at last, on the map.

I hope you enjoy reading these, and other stories, in this bumper issue.

Amanda Giles

Natural succes

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill to create Natural England received Royal Assent on 30 March 2006.

It unites English Nature, the Landscape, Access and Recreation divisions of the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service arm of Defra as one powerful champion for the environment.

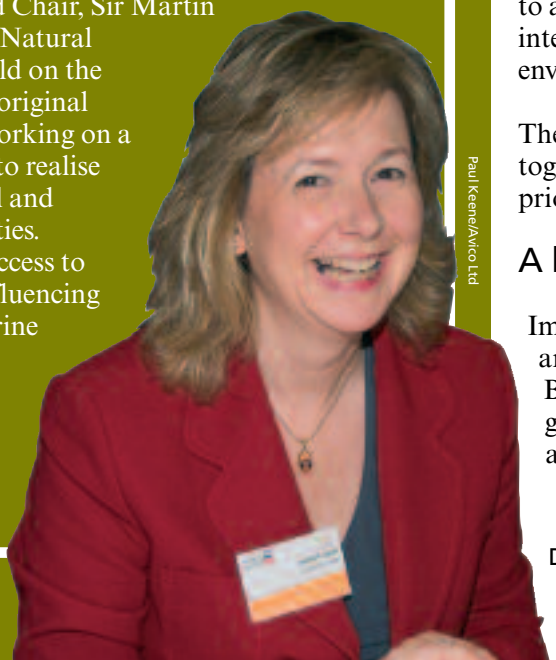
The act sets the organisation a new purpose: to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

In a nutshell, the new body will have responsibility for enhancing biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife, promoting access, recreation and public wellbeing and contributing to the way natural resources are managed.

Dr Helen Phillips, who will be Natural England's Chief Executive said, "The Royal Assent for the NERC Bill was a crucial step and we are now forging ahead to develop strong relationships with our partners.

"We will put people right at the heart of our decision-making. We will ensure we conserve and enhance the natural environment not only for its intrinsic value, but for people's wellbeing and enjoyment and the economic prosperity that it brings."

Natural England Chair, Sir Martin Doughty, said, "Natural England will build on the strengths of the original organisations, working on a landscape-scale to realise benefits for rural and urban communities. Greater public access to the coast and influencing the planned Marine Bill will be early priorities."



Paul Keene/Avirco Ltd

A new direction

Natural England will be more than a merger of three organisations. It will create the opportunity to take a new approach to the way we protect and improve our natural environment.

It has been formed at a time when we face growing pressures from climate change and the way people use the world's natural resources for food, energy production, transport and housing. Working with its partners, it will take direct action to reduce these pressures, and will use its influence to persuade others to do the same.

Natural England will encourage people to enjoy, understand and get out into the outdoors, making the most of the health and wellbeing benefits this offers. This can be done at the same time as it fulfils its other main objective of ensuring England's plants and animals, landscapes, geology and soils, freshwater and marine environments are all conserved and enhanced.

Natural England will play a central role in dealing with climate change and ensuring that the natural environment is resilient enough to adapt.

Partnership will be vital, working with Government Departments and agencies, such as Regional Development Agencies, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission, National Park Authorities and the Commission for Rural Communities.

The organisation will liaise with land managers, scientists, businesses, community groups and voluntary organisations to achieve its aims. It will advise the Government and international organisations on policies which affect the environment.

The founding organisations have been working closely together to prepare for the merger and have agreed four priorities for the first three years:

A healthy environment

Improving the protection and management of important areas, like National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other designated sites will ensure that future generations can enjoy England's rich geology, landscapes and wildlife.

Dr Helen Phillips

sion

The legislation has been approved which paves the way for Natural England to open for business in October. But what will the changes mean – and what exactly will the role of the new organisation be?

Natural England will have the task of making sure the environment is in good enough condition to provide clean water and air, healthy food, and recreation for the foreseeable future.

It will work towards targets like 78 per cent of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) reaching favourable condition by March 2007 and reversing the long-term decline of farmland birds by 2020. The state of our coasts and seas will be high on the agenda.

Enjoyment

In England, we take 1.26 billion outdoor trips each year, which is known to be good for our health and wellbeing. Getting people to take more exercise is a Government priority.

Natural England will encourage outdoor activity and strive to reach the other one-third of adults who don't visit the countryside or open spaces, so they too can benefit. It will aim to get more people involved in caring for their environment – one way to achieve this will be by building on the interest sparked by popular TV nature programmes, like the BBC's *Springwatch* series.

Sustainability

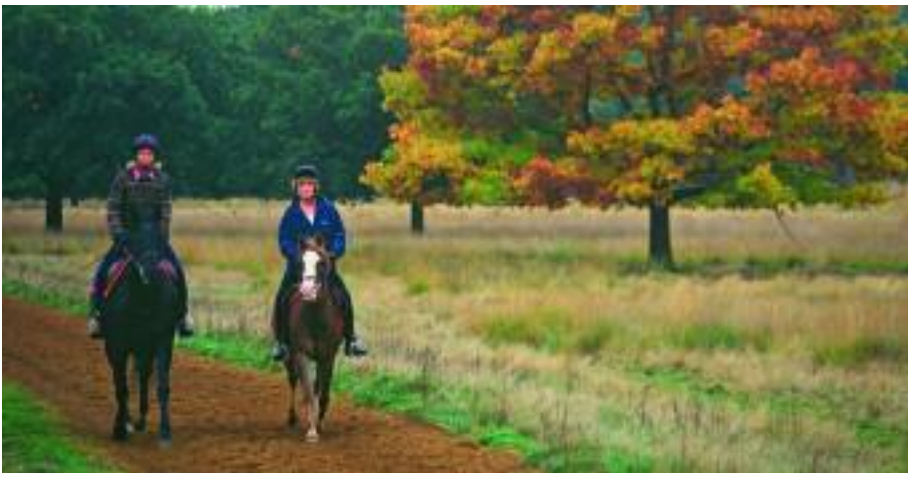
Global competition and the effects of climate change are putting pressure on farmers and fishermen to produce higher financial returns to stay in business. Natural England with have the task of ensuring that we use natural resources in a way that does not cause long-term damage to our land and seas.

It will work with Government and developers to balance the need for new homes, roads and infrastructure with the need to preserve our greenspace.

The future

Climate change, agricultural reform, urban development and transport are some of the main factors which will significantly affect the natural environment over the next 50 years.

Natural England's role will be to ensure that Governments, businesses, communities and individuals take account of the impact their decision-making has on nature and that there is enough evidence to help people make the best choices.



Paul Glendell/English Nature

Horse riders enjoy the outdoors in London's Richmond Park National Nature Reserve

English Nature

Poul Christensen

Farming champion to be Deputy Chair

Poul Christensen has been appointed Deputy Chair Designate of Natural England, and took this role on in April. He comes from Defra's Rural Development Service where he was Chair from February 2005.

A founder-member of the Tenant Farmers Association from 1981, he farms in a family partnership in Oxfordshire – his farm was one of the first to promote biodiversity nearly 30 years ago.

Mr Christensen has chaired many agricultural organisations, including the National Farmers Union Oxfordshire milk committee and the Minister of Agriculture's South East Regional Panel. He was awarded the CBE in 1991 for services to agriculture, particularly the commercial development of the Agricultural Development Advisory Service (ADAS).

Announcing the appointment, Margaret Beckett, then Environment Secretary, said, "Poul is a dedicated champion of conservation issues and the natural environment with a proven track record of service on public bodies."

Updates

Hosehill Lake LNR, Berkshire

Tipping the scales for London's adders

In London, the adder could once be seen basking within the sound of Bow Bells and was encountered in the woods of Hampstead, Highgate and Hornsey.

But the shy, secretive snake, one of our four native reptiles, is in serious decline within Greater London, due to disturbance and loss of suitable habitat. There are now only four known populations in the capital, living in geographically isolated sites. At least one of the London populations is so small it may face extinction.

The decline of adders in London reflects how much of the city's natural habitat has been lost through urban expansion and emphasises the importance of protecting and improving the city's greenspace to support wildlife.

A partnership of organisations led by English Nature is working to safeguard the remaining populations through a Biodiversity Action Plan for reptiles in London. Partners survey areas where it is hoped there may be undiscovered populations.

Adders live in a range of habitats including grassland, heathland and woodland and often hibernate in the same place every year. The partners are working with site managers to conserve these habitats by removing scrub from around their hibernation sites, to give them space to bask in the sun and raise their body temperature.

In a foreword to an English Nature Research Report on the conservation status of London's adders, the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, says, "Londoners are fortunate to be living in one of the greenest major world cities. A long history of provision and protection has left us with many beautiful and internationally renowned open spaces that support a wealth of wildlife.

"I believe we have a responsibility to protect and conserve adders and to pass them on to future generations of Londoners, thriving, rather than struggling to survive. It would be sad, indeed, should the adder become extinct in London."

The elusive adder

Will Atkins/LEHART

Breathing places are put on the map

The latest *Springwatch* series, with Bill Oddie, Kate Humble and Simon King, focused on local greenspace as part of the BBC's *Breathing Places* campaign to get people working for wildlife on their own doorsteps.

Following on from the series, there will be local events throughout the summer from July onwards, feeding into the *Breathing Places* campaign.

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are ideal sites for local action, and they are springing up all over the country in response to the desire to create greenspace in every neighbourhood. There are now more than 1,300 across the country.

English Nature's LNR *Springwatch* officer, Rosy Key, has been highlighting ideal sites for the *Springwatch* programmes. Because new ones are being declared all the time, Rosy is working to make sure people can find consistent information about all the reserves. She is gathering information on what there is to see, what visitors can do, such as events and walks and how to get there.

The information is to be posted on the English Nature website **www.english-nature.org.uk/** select Special Sites, then Local Nature Reserves.

The website will also list facilities like visitor centres and leaflets, access levels, the reserve's status (eg Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), urban fringe or rural), who owns or manages the site, any volunteers' or friends' organisations, and contacts for more information and how to get involved.

Rosy said, "We want to make it easier for people to find these wonderful wild places, and fire their imagination by telling them what they can do there and what sort of wildlife, habitats or geological features they can see."

For more information about *Springwatch* visit **www.bbc.co.uk/nature/animals/wildbritain/springwatch**

Planning with wildlife in mind

A housing development in Wiltshire has been designed with wildlife in mind. It includes a village pond, providing a habitat for newts and frogs, bat boxes on every house and a 'green' drainage system to avoid wasting water.

The Peak District National Park Authority insists that a bat protection scheme is included in any planning applications for sensitive developments, such as barn conversions.

Hampton township, a major housing scheme on the edge of Peterborough incorporates a network of green spaces as a recreation area for residents, a home for wildlife and an area to take drainage water. This is known in planning circles as the 'green infrastructure' principle.

Patrick Cashman

Sustainable drainage at Marden Mill, Wiltshire

These are just a few examples of how development and conservation can work side by side and how the planning system can be used positively to conserve and enhance the natural environment.

Examples like these are outlined in a new Good Practice guide produced by English Nature, with Defra and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now the Department for Communities and Local Government).

Planning for Biodiversity and Geological Conservation: A Guide to Good Practice supports the Government's Planning Policy Statement on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (PPS9).

The guide includes ideas like tapping into local expertise and working with biodiversity partnerships to integrate nature conservation into plans. It shows how some planning authorities are using biodiversity checklists and design guides to advise developers.

Jonathan Price, English Nature's Senior Planning Advisor, and main author of the guide, said, "I hope this guide inspires more planning authorities to follow these examples and find ways of supporting wildlife in their own areas. What works well for nature invariably makes for healthier and happier places to live in, work in and enjoy."

Let's Go into the countryside

A team of volunteers is out and about in Bedfordshire, checking out all the best places to enjoy the countryside.

The green inspectors, from the Forest of Marston Vale, trek round the area's walks, cycle routes, bridleways and open spaces, noting surface types, slopes, gates and stiles or any obstacles. Their findings are posted on the *Let's Go* website to help people choose suitable spots to visit.

Ian Outram, 66, a retired entomologist from the village of Aspley Guise, has covered around 75–100 miles over the past year, surveying walks for the website.

He said, "The idea is to provide people with enough first-hand information to make up their own minds where they would like to go. If they have a positive experience, they are more likely to go out and do it again. "

Forest of Marston Vale

Volunteer auditors stride out in the Millennium Country Park, Marston Moretaine

The *Let's Go* project has been revitalised with fresh funding from the Countryside Agency of £6,000, to which Bedfordshire County Council has added £1,500. It is part of a campaign to get more people out enjoying what the area has to offer. The target is to have 200 attractions listed by the end of this year.

The Natural England partners are working closely together on the project with plans to identify areas of access on land with Countryside Stewardship access funding or on appropriate National Nature Reserves (NNRs).

Visit the Let's Go Bedfordshire site at **www.letsgo.org.uk**

Heralding the dawn

English Nature's Chief Executive, Dr Andy Brown, has witnessed more than two decades of change in the nature conservation world. Here, he reviews English Nature's greatest achievements and looks ahead to the challenges facing Natural England.

Looking back: Decades of striving and success

English Nature

Dr Andy Brown at English Nature's Charter Mark celebrations in October 2005

Like so many others involved in nature conservation, I can trace my love of nature back to my childhood – the land next to my house, the pond at the end of the road and a disused quarry nearby.

These were great places to play, build dens and hunt things like frogs and slow worms. Sadly, so many of these places have been filled in and built on, leaving only manicured playing fields. At least the loss of such informal greenspaces in urban areas has been partially offset by the growth in Local Nature Reserves.

I joined the Nature Conservancy Council back in 1983. The organisation was just getting to grips with the landmark Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. I regard it as a landmark, because it required us to notify landowners and managers of Sites of Special Scientific Interest designations on their land and put in place a mechanism to discuss land use and management changes with them.

Perhaps even more importantly, it was a triumph for the Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) who campaigned tirelessly for the new legislation. The passion and knowledge volunteers have for natural history has contributed immensely to our understanding of habitats and species and how to conserve them. Many achievements of the statutory agencies like English Nature are rooted in, and dependent upon, their contribution.

English Nature was formed in 1991 and, during the 1990s, important foundations were laid – based on the principle that, as a public body, we needed a more integrated approach, and a greater focus on people.

English Nature has achieved a great deal over the last 15 years. First and foremost, we have helped wildlife. Biodiversity is now a word in common currency with politicians, the media and many others. The continued rise of interest in the natural environment is very real and a great opportunity for

The growth of greenspace

There are currently around 1,300 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in England, covering an area over 35,000 hectares.

Sites range from windswept coastal headlands, ancient woodlands and flower-rich meadows to urban parks and greenspaces such as old railway lines, disused quarries and industrial areas.

As well as providing a haven for wildlife, they are also places for people – somewhere to enjoy nature, exercise or just relax.

English Nature wants to see:

- a hectare of LNR for every thousand people
- one accessible 500 hectare site within 10 km of every home
- one 100 hectare site within 5 km of every home

# of a new era

Natural England to build on. Just look at the growth in membership of NGOs and the current audience figures for natural history programmes such as *Springwatch* and *Planet Earth*.

- at least one 20 hectare site within 2 km of every home
- a natural greenspace less than 300 metres from every home.

LNRs are declared by local authorities, parish or town councils, with advice from English Nature. They are usually expected to be bigger than 2 hectares and have high natural interest in the area for wildlife or geology. The local community should be able to enjoy them, and they are likely to be suitable for education or research.

Many reserves have been created with the support of English Nature's *Wildspace!* scheme, with 311 new LNRs declared since it started in 2001. A total of £7 million has been paid out through *Wildspace!* grants, with most of the money coming from the Big Lottery Fund.

LNRs on the map: See page 6

Tuned into nature

BBC/Nicholas Brown

Sir David Attenborough visits the Kentish Flats Offshore Wind Farm

A total of 9.1 million people watched the BBC's groundbreaking *Planet Earth* series with veteran nature presenter Sir David Attenborough.

When he recently examined climate change issues in *Are We Changing Planet Earth?* he was joined by 5.4 million people, making it the most-watched factual programme of the week and more popular than *Big Brother*. The follow-up, *Can We Save Planet Earth?* attracted 4.1 million viewers.

The BBC's *Springwatch* with Bill Oddie, Kate Humble and Simon King attracted 3.7 million viewers last summer – and this year's programme is expected to pull in new fans and reach an even bigger audience.

Springwatch is linked to the BBC's ambitious five-year *Breathing Places* campaign – which aims to increase wildlife-friendly greenspaces across the country. English Nature is a key player.

The aim is to encourage large numbers of ordinary people to get to know the greenspaces in their area and look after them in a way that benefits wildlife and people at the same time.

Breathing Places, See page 6

One of the most substantial developments since 1991 has been the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. It introduced a target-driven approach to conserving habitats and species, encouraged partnerships, united communities and stimulated action on the ground.

There have been some great success stories and a number of these projects were initiated by the Species Recovery Programme. Red kites were brought back from the brink (*Northern Kites: see pages 16–17*) and the BAP target for bitterns was exceeded. On the invertebrate list, the dotted bee-fly, field cricket and ladybird spiders are doing well, along with a number of other species.

The British endemic grass *Bromus interruptus* was reintroduced into the wild and creeping marshwort is flourishing on a few sites. Perhaps the biggest gains for habitats have been improvements in lowland heathland, peatland restoration and a significant increase in the area of reedbeds.

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Creeping marshwort – on the Species Recovery Programme – flourishes on Port Meadow with Wolvercote Common & Green SSSI

However, it is not all good news. It has proved a much bigger challenge to progress with some of the widely distributed species and widespread habitats due to the scale of shifts needed in government policy.

Linked with BAP is the sustainable development agenda and quality-of-life indicators. Defra's recently revised sustainable development strategy brings back to the fore the essential idea of living within environmental limits. The difference between economic development and sustainable development is that, in the case of the latter, the environment is fully factored into policies and decisions. It is only by looking after the environment and all the

Robin Williams/Avico Ltd

Doing well: the dotted bee-fly *Bombylius discolor* seen at Kyntons Mead, Somerset Levels

Michael Hammett/English Nature

Help for heathland habitats

Over the last 100 years, the UK lost 80 per cent of its lowland heath to agriculture, forestry and development, with the remaining 20 per cent neglected and suffocated by bracken and scrub.

The National Lowland Heathland Programme was set up in 1993 to redress the balance and was succeeded in 1997 by the *Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage* programme.

The scheme was set up by English Nature for the Lowland Heathland BAP (Biodiversity Action Plan) Steering Group, and involved over 150 organisations across the UK.

More than 40,000 hectares of heathland is now being managed and improved under the programme and more than 2,000 hectares of new heath has been created.

This has helped around 60 BAP species to recover including the silver-studded blue butterfly and the three important heathland birds, the nightjar, Dartford warbler and woodlark.

By the time the programme comes to an end in 2008 it will have spent £26 million on heathland recovery, including £14 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The silver-studded blue butterfly – helped by heathland recovery work

systems and processes that provide us with resources, recycling, purification and regulatory systems on which life ultimately depends, that we can ever move to a more sustainable, equitable and just society.

One of our major successes has been the drive to bring SSSIs into favourable condition. Defra first adopted the condition of SSSIs as a Public Service Agreement target in 2000. It was a brave step and has focused everyone's attention on the need to address a wide range of problems on SSSIs. Progress has been made every single year since the assessment standards were adopted as a common approach throughout the UK.

Peter Wakeley/English Nature

Heathland with bracken/ling sward on Cannock Chase SSSI, which is on its way to recovery

Site standards success

- The target for SSSIs is to bring 95 per cent of all nationally important wildlife sites into favourable or recovering condition by 2010.
- Sites are said to be in favourable condition if their important habitats, features and species are in a healthy state and are being conserved for the future by appropriate management. If measures are in place to tackle the reasons for unfavourable condition, they are said to be in recovering condition.
- Along with the status of farmland birds, SSSI condition is now seen as the key indicator of the health of the natural environment.
- English Nature's latest figures showed 72.3 per cent of sites in target condition.
- These cover an area of 776,657 hectares out of the country's 1,074,215 hectares of SSSI land.
- Since 2000 English Nature completed the first-ever SSSI land survey. The full results, published in 2003 showed 58 per cent of sites to be favourable or recovering.
- This means a total of 170,000 hectares – an area about the size of Worcestershire – has been brought up to target condition.

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Agriculture is facing many changes

Over the life of English Nature we have advocated many changes to Government policies. Take the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – the weaknesses in the policy at the start of the 1990s were apparent to many – a subsidy payment system driving production to unprecedented levels, but with huge costs to the environment.

Now we have the uncoupled payments, the huge potential of the new Environmental Stewardship scheme and, at last, serious attention being given to diffuse sources of pollution. It has been a rollercoaster ride for farmers and I am sure there is still a long way to go, but the opportunities ahead for rewarding farmers who deliver a range of public benefits has to be better than European handouts which encourage environmental damage.

English Nature, along with others like the RSPB and the influential Policy Commission On The Future Of Farming And Food, ably led by Sir Don Curry, played a key role in creating a shift towards a more sustainable approach to agriculture.

The Curry Report made over 100 recommendations for shaping change in the farming and food sector including:

- early radical reform of the Common Agricultural Policy
- retargeting of public funds towards environmental and rural development goals instead of subsidising production
- measures to strengthen the food supply chain and get farmers to work together
- clear food labelling to enable consumers to make informed choices

The issue of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) sparked intense public debate and controversy. We believed the environmental effects were unknown and the risks too great without further research. We held our ground with government, sometimes in the face of enormous pressure. Carefully controlled field trials were proposed, under the leadership of Michael Meacher, then Environment Minister. This subsequently demonstrated that the impacts on biodiversity were significant and could not be ignored.

There are success stories throughout the country where sites have been saved, species pulled back from extinction and communities have given their all to look after an area.

The absurd destruction of peat bogs to satisfy our gardening and horticultural needs dominated much of the 1990s. The NGOs campaigned tirelessly and very effectively to get people to change their behaviour. If Kew Gardens, the Eden project and the National Trust can all operate without using peat then I'm sure everybody else can. But industrial-scale extraction of peat continued in many parts of the country.

Eventually, a deal brokered over one landmark site, Thorne and Hatfield Moors, marked an important turning point. Work is now underway to restore over 35 square kilometres of peatland here – probably the largest habitat restoration project in Europe.

The results are already apparent. Species such as sphagnum mosses, cotton grass and the insectivorous sundew are returning. The power of nature to recover never ceases to amaze me.

Cutting a deal on peat bogs

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Peat digging operations at Wedholme Flow SSSI, Cumbria, in 1989

The Thorne and Hatfield Moors, in South Yorkshire, incorporate the two largest lowland raised peat bogs in the UK.

The bogs were severely damaged over the years by peat cutting – until a £17.3 million agreement was reached in 2001 to buy out the extraction rights and restore the site, now a National Nature Reserve (NNR).

The land first came into English Nature's hands in 1994 when it was sold by Fison's for a peppercorn sum of £1. But this was on the proviso that the extraction company, Scott's UK, was allowed to continue taking peat from established areas – a compromise which sparked great controversy.

This continued for seven years until, after a massive campaign by the NGOs and other environmental groups, Defra came up with the money to buy out the peat rights.

The funding included £1.3 million to restore the habitat and work has been going on to rehydrate the site and create ideal conditions for bog species. Drainage systems, put in to dry out the peat for easier removal, have had to be blocked or sluices installed to seasonally regulate water levels.

The peat extraction company was appointed to work on the restoration project, having the appropriate machinery and expertise – so the machinery originally used towards the destruction of habitat was later used to recreate it.

The NNR was declared in October 2005 and the restoration is due to be completed on 30 September this year.

Other important policy work we were involved in during this time was the marine environment. We led the campaign called *Living with the Sea* which brought about a fundamental shift in government thinking on sustainable coastal management and the need to let natural systems operate dynamically in some areas.

The creation of European marine sites where stakeholders manage marine areas has been a success under the Habitats Directive although the challenge of over-fishing remains a huge problem and a full system of Marine Protected Areas has yet to be established.

Sea changes

- The Habitats Directive in 1992 led to the creation of 39 European marine sites in England, as part of the Europe-wide Natura 2000 network. These include 23 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and 41 Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

Any Natura 2000 site in the UK extending below the high tide level is called a European marine site. It protects important wildlife, like seals, and habitats including reefs, sandbanks and estuaries.

English Nature identified the sites and carried out consultation. We led the *UK Marine SACs Project* to help manage sites including developing management schemes.

European marine sites (EMS) have improved the way organisations work together in the coastal and marine environment. We now have a better relationship with ports authorities and voluntary codes of conduct help to manage activities. Many of the sites are used for education.

Ongoing work is identifying offshore SACs from 0–12 nautical miles out from the coast. In 2005, pilot surveys were carried out at Eddystone Reef, Devon, and in the Outer Thames Estuary with more surveys this summer to identify new sites and complete the EMS series in English waters by 2008.

- English Nature's Maritime Strategy highlights the need to go a step further – seeking legislation to create a network of Marine Protected Areas. These would offer varying protection levels, including Highly Protected Marine Reserves, and allow the whole marine ecosystem to recover.

Natural England's target will be to establish a network of MPAs by 2012. It is hoped that the Government's Marine Bill will give us the tools to do this over the next few years.

Finding Sanctuary – See page 21

- *Living with the Sea* was an influential four-year LIFE-Nature project which looked closely at the issues of coastal change, nature conservation and flood risk management. It built on English Nature's coastal work, such as management realignment at Tollesbury in Essex, which involved flooding low-lying land and allowing new saltmarsh to regenerate naturally.

The project involved a range of partners and interested parties who are all now more aware of why and how coastlines need to change naturally to maintain biological interest and respond to rising sea levels and how this affects flood risk management.

Although the project ended in 2003, its achievements are still influencing methods of coastal management today, such as the use of Coastal Habitat Management Plans (ChaMPs). The partners are now developing strategies for coastal management and the Natura 2000 network which take a long-term view.

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Seawater pours onto arable land as part of the managed retreat at Blackwater Estuary, in Tollesbury, Essex

Paul Naylor/Great British Marine Animals

Marine Protected areas would allow the whole marine ecosystem to recover, benefiting UK species like the conger eel *Conger conger* found in crevices in rocky areas all around Britain.

Tide turned at Dibden Bay

English Nature achieved a notable victory in the battle to protect our fragile coast when we helped to prevent the building of a container port at Dibden Bay near Southampton. The development would have damaged internationally important wildlife sites.

The Secretary of State for Transport turned down the application by Associated British Ports, in April 2004, after a year-long public inquiry.

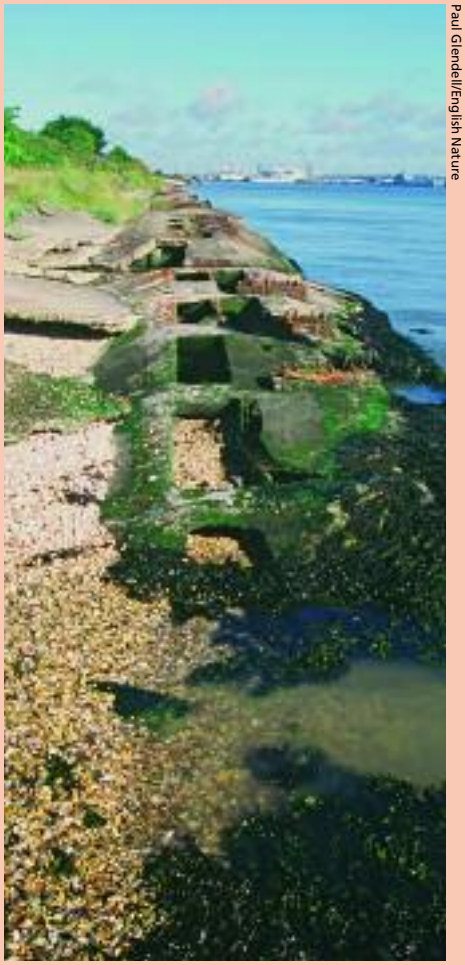
The port would have damaged parts of the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA) and RAMSAR site and Solent Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC), taking away the habitats of thousands of birds. English Nature warned that it would also harm eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

The Solent and Southampton Water SPA is used by 50,000 waterbirds every winter, making it one of the most important places in the country for wintering wildfowl. Dibden Bay is important for oystercatchers, grey plover, wigeon, curlew, lapwing and internationally significant numbers of dark-bellied brent geese.

The saltmarshes of Southampton Water contain specialist plants and flowers, with European importance, such as cord grass, marsh samphire and sea purslane. English Nature was concerned that a new port would add to long-term erosion of the saltmarshes.

ABP disputed the extent of the damage and the measures needed to offset this, but the Secretary of State said the nature conservation impacts were too great to justify the development.

The case focused attention on ways of working towards sustainable port developments in future – which were demonstrated recently on the Humber Estuary where we were able to agree the creation of replacement habitat, enabling port development to go ahead.



Paul Glendell/English Nature

Dibden Bay water-front

Looking forward:
A time of change and challenges

On 1 October 2006, Natural England will bring together the work of English Nature, the environment activities of the Rural Development Service and the Landscape, Access and Recreation division of the Countryside Agency.

Since the start of the review by Lord Haskins which led us here, I have been an advocate of the change. It has always seemed to me to make sense to have our most beautiful landscapes and protected areas dealt with by one public body. Access and recreational activity sit comfortably with understanding and awareness of the natural environment.

Natural England has the potential to become a bigger, stronger and more effective champion of the natural environment than any organisation it supersedes.

I hope Natural England will be able to engage the actual and latent support there is throughout society for caring for our home – Planet Earth. We can only conserve natural resources and move to a more sustainable way of living if everyone wants to.

And people will only be committed to moving in this direction when they see and understand the reasons, are optimistic that it is possible, and are confident they can make a difference. Natural England will need to engage people where they are, and on the basis of what is important to them.

At the moment, we are living in a completely unsustainable way.

The greatest challenge we face is not further agricultural change, house building or any of the myriad of things that eat away at nature – it is global warming.

It will change our approach to all the other shorter-term and smaller-scale issues. Unless it is seriously addressed it puts at risk the whole of civilisation. The catastrophic consequences of exceeding 450ppm of CO_2 in the atmosphere are very real.

Vast ice sheets melt, ocean and atmospheric circulatory systems change, the regulatory potential of the oceans and the forests give way and sea-level rises endanger a substantial proportion of the human race. It is a truly terrible scenario, and action must be taken now.

Addressing climate change requires the mass mobilisation of resources and fundamental changes to what we all do. Natural England must think deeply, with others, about the best way to reduce emissions and to adapt to the inevitable changes already underway.

The issue must be factored into decisions across the whole spectrum of land and water resource use and nature conservation. It cannot be addressed by any one organisation, but Natural England must be at the forefront of action to address what is perhaps the greatest challenge yet faced by humanity.

The new body will inherit a substantial amount of scientific understanding and information about the natural environment, a wonderful group of staff and many supporters, volunteers and friends in other organisations. I know that everybody wishes Natural England every success.

Andy Brown

Pete Bucktrout/British Antarctic Survey

Icicles form as meltwater drips from winter sea ice grounded as the tide drops on the Antarctic Peninsula. The Antarctic Peninsula, Siberia and Alaska are experiencing the most rapid temperature rises.

Seeing the bigge

A more holistic approach to conservation work is taking root across the country.

Rather than concentrating on isolated single reserves, the new ethos is to work on a much bigger, whole landscape scale, linking networks of important sites and allowing wildlife to move between them.

With this approach, there is no fixed way of working or branding projects. Instead, the concept gives solutions which take account of cultural, recreational and economic elements, and bring a wide range of benefits to local people.

Partnership is at the heart of these initiatives, with everyone involved aiming to achieve their objectives in a way that makes the whole project sustainable.

English Nature describes this approach as Area-Based Delivery (ABD). A programme of initiatives under this umbrella started in 2004 with a budget of about £800,000 a year covering around 33 different projects. Funding is also brought in by the local partners and through external funding bids.

English Nature Landscape Ecologist, Steve Preston, said, "Each project has its own particular objectives. Many have set out a wish-list for where they want to see habitats restored and created. Done in the right way, these can fulfil other objectives at the same time. Similarly, planning or development proposals will proceed only after they have taken on board conservation advice, ensuring these initiatives also benefit the environment.

"This way of working is very much in tune with the ethos of Natural England and we feel the approach can be sustained in the long term even if there are a few short-term challenges to overcome before we get there."

Red kites' return is

Keith Bowey introduces children at Winlaton West Primary school to their adopted kite, the Winlaton Phoenix.

The return of red kites to the skies above Gateshead is seen as a symbol of recovery for the region.

The Northern Kites Project, which has reintroduced the spectacular birds of prey to their former range in the Lower Derwent Valley, unashamedly promotes them as an environmental icon – aimed at capturing the imaginations of local people.

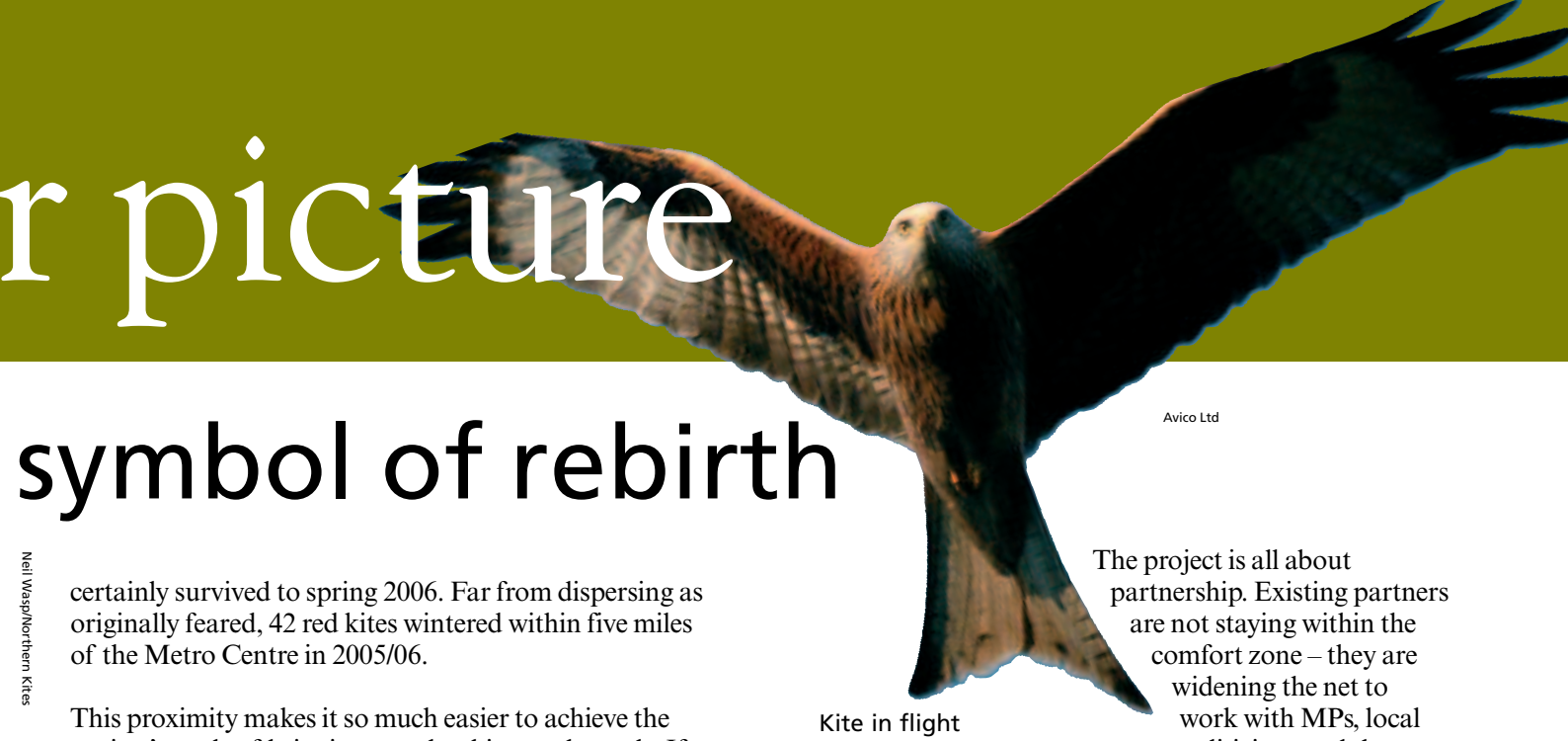
Communities in this part of the North East are emerging from generations of deprivation, job losses and economic decline. The current resurgence around Newcastle/ Gateshead Quays is embodied by the famous Angel of the North sculpture – while the Northern Kites signify a greener environment, indicating a better quality of life.

Red kite reintroduction projects across the country are linked by their common ecological aims. And the birds themselves have their own personal connections – the young Northern Kites come from the original Chilterns population.

But what sets the Northern Kites Project apart is that the birds have been released just three miles from the bustling Gateshead Metro Centre – 6.5 miles from the urban centre of Newcastle.

It is the first time in the world that kites have been reintroduced so close to a population of around 1.2 million people, says Project Manager, Keith Bowey. And, of the 61 kites released in the first two years, the project has confirmed that 79 per cent, at least, have

r picture



Avico Ltd

Kite in flight

symbol of rebirth

Neil Wasp/Northern Kites

certainly survived to spring 2006. Far from dispersing as originally feared, 42 red kites wintered within five miles of the Metro Centre in 2005/06.

This proximity makes it so much easier to achieve the project's goals of bringing together kites and people. If people identify with the kites, it helps them to enjoy and understand wildlife and the wider environment.

Keith said, "We are using the kites as a way of involving the people of this area. We want them to be seen, not just as spectacular wildlife, but also as an iconic image representing the region's green environment – the glue that can help cement communities and society.

"If they are valued by people who have never been given a positive message about the environment, they could help reshape attitudes and people may start to think about their own impact on their surroundings."

Local schools can adopt the newly-released red kites, giving them names and becoming advocates for the project.

Keith recently spoke to members of the Rowland's Gill Live at Home Scheme, a social group for single older people. He said, "They live in the core project area and many are grandparents. It is likely that their grandchildren have adopted a red kite at school. So the message is trickling up and down across the generations."

The project is all about partnership. Existing partners are not staying within the comfort zone – they are widening the net to work with MPs, local politicians and the Regional Development Agency – to encourage them to use these magnificent birds of prey to promote the region from their own perspective.

The partners

- English Nature
- The RSPB
- Gateshead Council
- Northumbrian Water
- The National Trust
- Forestry Commission
- Support funding from Heritage Lottery Fund and SITA Trust

Northern Kites

In Gateshead's Derwent Valley

Food for thought

While the red kite is certainly not tame, it is has always been able to live successfully alongside humans, taking advantage of opportunities to find food wherever they arise.

In medieval times, they were found scavenging among the refuse thrown out onto open streets in some major towns. Red kites and ravens were the first birds in Britain to receive legal protection for their valued street-cleaning role.

In the Chilterns today, red kites are often seen over small towns and villages and have become regular visitors to gardens, where many people feed them.

Some people believe that providing supplementary food for red kites is inadvisable as it may lead to unnaturally high concentrations of birds and reduce the rate at which they spread to recolonise new areas.

There are concerns that butchers' off-cuts or processed meat are a poor substitute for the food they depend on in the wild. They derive essential vitamins and minerals from skin and pieces of bone and unsuitable supplementary food may lead to growth problems if used by adult birds to feed their young.

Anyone continuing to feed red kites is advised to put food out irregularly, in small amounts, and to use chopped animal carcasses rather than processed or cooked meat. It is suggested that food should only be put out in the afternoon so birds forage naturally during the first half of each day.

- This advice is taken from the second edition of *Red Kites in the Chilterns* produced jointly by English Nature and the Chilterns Conservation Board.

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Dykeside vegetation at Woodwalton Fen

Fens link forms wetland super site

The Great Fen Project in Cambridgeshire is restoring more than 3,000 hectares of farmland to fenland wildlife habitat by connecting and enlarging two National Nature Reserves.

The expanded site, between Huntingdon and Peterborough, will combine two English Nature reserves – Woodwalton Fen NNR – internationally important for its wetland plants and animals – and Holme Fen NNR, the most south-easterly raised bog in Britain. It will also draw in other sites like the Wildlife Trust's Upwood Meadow NNR and some dry woodland habitat on the higher ground.

The fens have been badly dried out by hundreds of years of drainage, brought in to allow arable farming. The Great Fen Project is in the process of buying up farmland to incorporate in the expanded site, within the 115 hectares acquired so far.

Woodwalton Fen, spanning 208 hectares, is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a RAMSAR site and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It is made up of habitats including purple moor grass meadows, tall fen and scrub communities, woodland and other types of grasses, sedges, herbs and mosses. The fen violet, notably, is found only in two other places in Britain.

Holme Fen is the most important site for fen wood rush, which is unique to the area, and the reserve retains a small area of sphagnum bog.

As well as protecting the important wildlife which is already there, the extended reserve is expected to attract new species including breeding waders like snipe and redshank, lapwing, bittern and otters.

Peter Wakely/English Nature

Wetland at Holme Fen

"Just as importantly, it will help wildlife populations mix and spread out across the area," said English Nature Site Manager, Alan Bowley.

"Working within small nature reserves isolated by large tracts of intensively managed farmland is like gardening in little flower pots. It is expensive and very difficult to balance the needs of different species. The landscape-scale approach allows us to operate a more natural system without having to intervene in such an intensive way."

The Great Fen Project, run by a partnership of English Nature, the Wildlife Trust, Huntingdonshire District Council and the Environment Agency, combines nature conservation with education, better access for the local community, tourism and other economic benefits.

Local farmers are being drawn in to help with the restoration work, including mowing, reseeding and cleaning out dykes – and in the long term they will be able to graze the site, to produce organic meat.

Reed and sedge can be harvested for thatching roofs, regenerating a local craft. Plans to develop access by water could benefit local boatyards and an influx of visitors will create a range of business opportunities.

Alan added, "One of the issues with improving access to nature reserves is how to encourage people to enjoy them without damaging the very things you are trying to protect. Over a wider area you can lessen the impact by zoning some sections as wilderness."

With the bigger picture constantly kept in view, the long-term vision is to expand the site even further, possibly linking with the Wicken Fen project – a similar initiative 30 miles away led by the National Trust – the Nene Washes SSSI, near Peterborough, and the South Peterborough Green Park Project which aims to create a green buffer around the urban areas of the city.

Mineral Valleys riches unearthed

A landscape-scale rural regeneration programme is taking place over 90,000 hectares of the upper catchment of the River Wear in west County Durham.

A former quarry and a derelict park, which was once strewn with abandoned cars, have been turned into green havens and an attractive wetland reserve has been created.

These are just some of the schemes (see below and right) that come under the umbrella of the Mineral Valleys Project. The project draws together a range of community initiatives which are linked geographically and share aims to enhance the environment and contribute to economic growth, often by attracting tourism.

They also celebrate the social and industrial heritage of the area, which was shaped by 900 years of coal and mineral extraction and has suffered severe deprivation since the decline of these industries.

The Mineral Valleys Project delivers 14 separate but connected initiatives to improve the area for people and nature. The project is halfway through its £5.2 million five-year programme, started in 2003. It is supported by a £2.7 million Heritage Lottery Fund grant. A powerful partnership of organisations and individuals from businesses, statutory agencies, local communities and the voluntary sector is involved.

Being part of the Mineral Valleys Project means groups can tap into a huge pool of experience, which encourages joint working and helps to avoid duplication. Local environmental organisations support each other with finance, staff, volunteers and expertise.

Volunteers built an eco-classroom as part of the **Harehope Quarry Project** where a disused limestone quarry has been transformed into a sustainable business venture. The classroom features renewable energy sources including solar and wind power. Hailed as a model of sustainability, it is now used as a base for environmental education and rural skills training.

Tony Devos/English Nature

View across Harehope Quarry

Durham Wildlife Trust led the **Wild Wetlands Project** at its Low Barns Nature Reserve near Witton-le-Wear. At one end, they created a series of habitats including reedbeds, seasonally wet grassland and marsh. These new wetlands linked two lakes already on the site. Visitors can now view the area from two new classroom-size bird hides. As the reeds establish, they should attract wading birds, such as bittern.

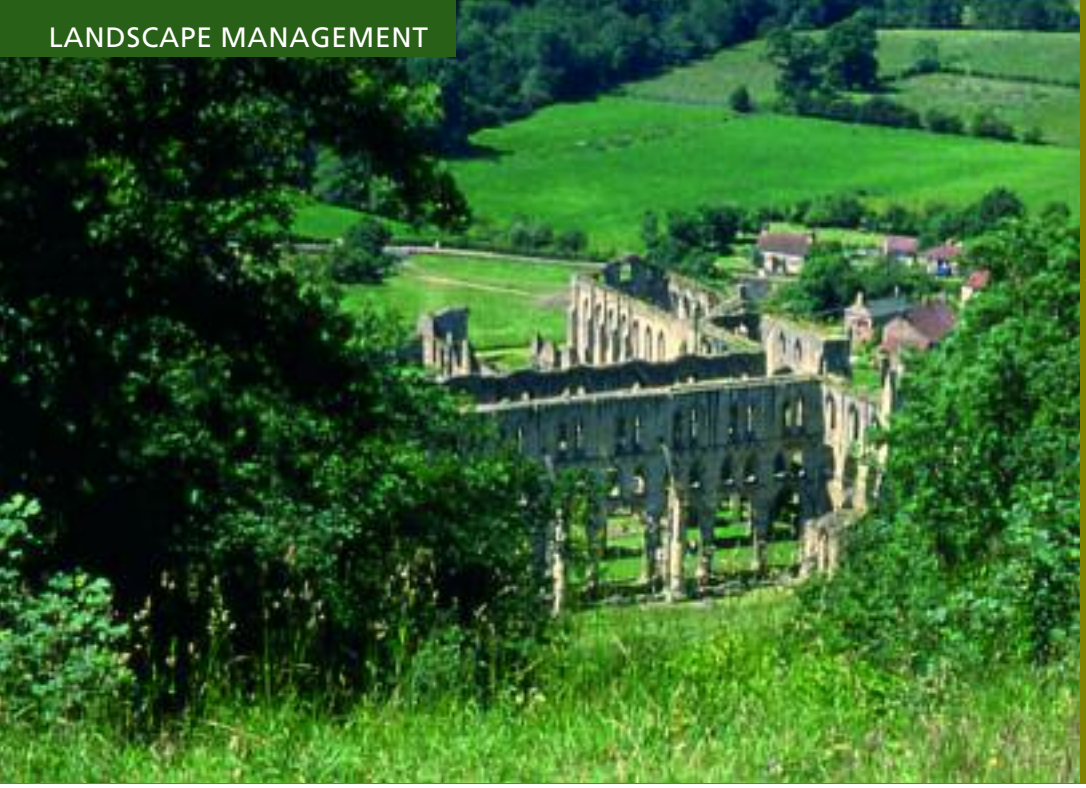
Kay Mills/Ground West Durham

The cenotaph at Willington

At **Jubilee Meadows**, Willington, an unloved park which had become a no-go area, was transformed into a nature park, now enjoyed by local people. The Willington Community Partnership, along with Groundwork West Durham, linked the meadows to the local cenotaph at the top of a steep hill. They laid a zigzag cobbled path and replaced a straight concrete culvert with a meandering stream. Willow walls and ditches keep out vehicles and stop people from dumping cars on the meadows.

David Long/Durham Wildlife Trust

'Local residents' view the new wetland area at Low Barns Nature Reserve



North York Moors National Park Authority

The rugged North York Moors have a rich and visible cultural heritage, and an integrated approach to land management here means this can often take centre stage.

Rievaulx Abbey is a local attraction

Shared vision for landscape and landmarks

In the Hambleton and Howardian Hills, iron age hill forts, medieval abbeys, historic parks and gardens and WWII defence sites nestle among moorland, wildflower meadows and ancient woodland.

Rievaulx and Byland Abbeys, Newburgh Priory, Duncombe Park Estate and Roulston Scar – thought to be England's biggest iron age hill fort – are all local attractions.

A group of organisations with similar environmental aims has come together as the CAN DO Partnership (Cultural and Natural Development Opportunities) to work towards a shared vision: to create an area of landscape, cultural heritage and biodiversity excellence which benefits the economic and social wellbeing of the community.

English Nature Conservation Officer, Andrew Windrum, said, "For a long time we were focused at the 'grain of sand' level, looking at individual SSSIs, or one particular field and being prescriptive about protecting specific areas. With this sort of partnership, we can look holistically, and more ambitiously, at the wider landscape."

The partnership, led by English Nature, English Heritage and the North York Moors National Park Authority, covers around 380 square km of countryside taking in the south western corner of the national park and the northern section of the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

This sparsely populated area (with just 5,000 residents) provides the perfect setting for English Heritage to pilot its rural initiatives. With historic buildings, including some Scheduled Monuments, set within Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and ancient woodland, there is plenty of common interest in the area.

Partnership Co-ordinator, Lyn Mansfield, said, "The CAN DO area was picked because it is recognised for its wealth of natural and cultural heritage. Despite recent losses through agricultural improvement and conifer planting over the last 50 years, this is a very special area where, we believe, it is possible to reverse the decline."

The partners have drawn up a wish-list of 130 priorities and are talking to the community about their aims. These include working towards economic growth, particularly through tourism, and increasing understanding of the natural environment. Local people are involved in projects to restore limestone grassland, helping rare butterflies like the Duke of Burgundy. Anglers have benefited from tree thinning along the River Rye.

It is hoped that Higher Level Stewardship will fund nature and heritage conservation schemes on farmland and a major bid is being made for Heritage Lottery Fund cash to take forward other initiatives.

Dr Sam Ellis/Butterfly Conservation

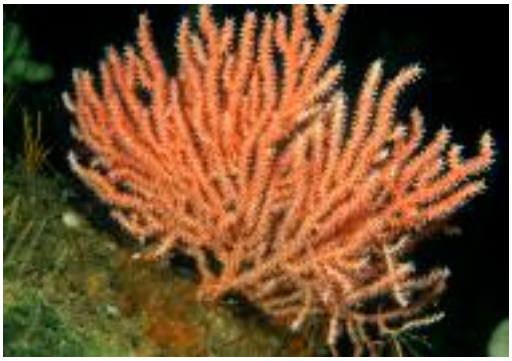
The Duke of Burgundy butterfly has been helped

Widening the net to save our seas

The holistic approach to managing our natural environment is also being used to protect our coasts and seas.

Up to now, England has only one designated Marine Protected Area – Devon's Lundy Island – which covers just 0.006 per cent of our 48,000 km of territorial waters.

But a new initiative is looking at larger areas, encompassing many different habitats – from sand, sea and soft mud to seagrass and rocky reef – all of which are equally important parts of the marine environment.



Paul Naylor/Great British Marine Animals

The Pink sea fan *Eunicella verrucose* is easily damaged

Finding Sanctuary is a five-year project focused on the seas of South West England. It covers a vast 90,000 square kms including 1,500 km of coastline stretching from Dorset to Devon, Cornwall and the Scilly Isles and from the high water mark to the continental shelf or median line. It is the first place in Europe where an integrated approach is taking place on this scale.

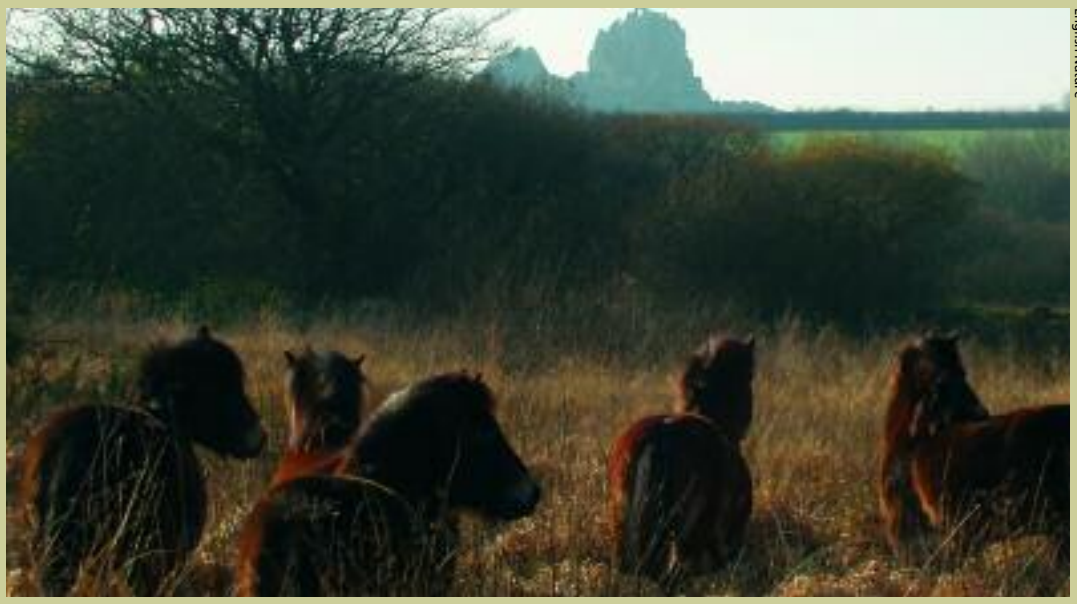
The big challenge is getting all the appropriate people involved. English Nature Project Officer, Tom Hooper, explained, "We are involving all the fishing, angling and conservation interests in choosing the best sites to protect, to avoid adversely affecting people's livelihoods. We want to create a better balance between long-term use and permanent protection for habitats and sealife."

Protection levels are likely to range from restricting specific damaging activities, like trawling, to complete restrictions within Highly Protected Marine Reserves or 'No Take Zones' where no living natural resources, including fish, crabs or lobsters, can be taken.

Long-term protection will allow the seabed to recover, so algae and other living creatures can return to areas already damaged by human activity. The pink sea fan, a soft coral seen around Lundy Island, takes several decades to grow and is easily damaged by modern fishing techniques.

English Nature has put £125,000 funding into the first phase of the project, which involves scientific mapping of habitats and breeding grounds, before sites can be created from 2011.

Merging moorland assets



English Nature

Exmoor ponies on Carbis Moor

A group of wet heaths, fens and mires, spread out over 60 square miles of Cornish countryside, makes up the mid-Cornwall moors.

The greatest part of this habitat is Goss and Tregoss Moors National Nature Reserve (NNR), but there are also many satellite areas, ranging in size, habitat type, history and ownership pattern.

These mid-Cornwall moors are one part of an extensive moorland chain stretching across south west England, and including The Lizard, Bodmin Moor, Exmoor and Dartmoor. Taken together on a whole landscape level, they provide the right conditions for otters, nightjar, the Dartford warbler and other moorland wildlife to thrive.

The Mid Cornwall Moors LIFE Project aims to ensure the future of the marsh fritillary butterfly, a rare species in decline throughout Europe which has a stronghold in south west England. The LIFE Project also benefits the economy, helping local people to exercise their grazing rights by removing scrub, building fences and stock pens and buying traditional breed cattle, giving them the opportunity to sell conservation grade beef. The project also uses Exmoor ponies on some sites.

A new section of the A30 being built to bypass the reserve, instead of dissecting it, will make management at a landscape level easier.

FOCUS ON... Suffolk Coast NNR

The biggest reedbed in Britain, teeming with birdlife, brings thousands of visitors every year to the Suffolk Coast National Nature Reserve.

English Nature

Blythe Estuary, on Walberswick NNR

Marsh harriers nest on the reserve, with bittern and bearded tits among the main attractions on the 190 hectares of reedbed. In summer, little terns see out the nesting season on the shingle beach.

Site Manager, Adam Burrows, said, "Visitors should listen out for the distinctive 'pinging call' of bearded tits moving through the reedbeds, where there are 50 or more nests. In July, the young birds start forming flocks and there can be 100 to 150 flying over the reeds. You would be unlucky not to see the marsh harriers as they stay on the reserve all year.

"Those who set out very early or very late may glimpse otters at Westwood Marsh or hear Water voles, plopping into the dyke."

Originally the English Nature site was known as Walberswick NNR but, at the turn of the century, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the RSPB clubbed together to buy the land and grazing marshes to the south. Walberswick, Hen Reedbed and Dingle Marshes were combined to create one big 840 hectare Suffolk Coast NNR.

Distinctive yellow horn poppy thrives on the beach and shore pools in summer. The shore pools between Walberswick and Dunwich are internationally important for the starlet sea anemone that lives at the edges of the creeks, saltmarshes and pools.

The reedbeds are surrounded by woodland and heather heath, which supports around 500 species of butterflies and moths, including the silver-studded blue butterfly. A predatory insect, the ant-lion, has recently colonised the heath, and it is interesting to look out for the pits it makes to trap its prey. Britain's largest recorded adder, 96cm long, was found on the western heath in the early 20th century and it is still considered one of the best places to see them.

The reserve has five types of deer – red, muntjac, Chinese and occasionally fallow and roe. Natterjack toads, last recorded in the area in 1947, were recently reintroduced.

There are 20 miles of public rights of way and 170 hectares of open access land, opened up recently under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) act.

Another enjoyable way to see the reserve is by boat from the Blythe River estuary.

Taking the green route

Reserve managers are keen to reduce traffic and are going to put into action a Green Transport plan, outlining the opportunities for walking, cycling and public transport.

Adam said, "Around 100,000 people visit us every year and we have found that most of them are driving. We are very keen to encourage people to use more sustainable methods to take pressure off the countryside and the local community."

How to get there

- Suffolk Coast NNR is south of Southwold, between the coastal town of Walberswick and Dunwich village.
- The nearest train station is in Halesworth and there are buses from Halesworth, Lowestoft and Ipswich to Southwold and Bythburgh.
- Car access is via the A12 and the B1387 to Walberswick and the B1125 to Dunwich.

Where to walk

There are several good walks in the area. A two mile walk from the Hoist car park follows a path through heath and woodland to an abandoned pump mill in the middle of the reedbed and continues for a mile to the shore pools and shingle beach. Or you can extend this into an eight mile walk by turning inland through the reeds and wet woodland returning via a path through the heath.

FOCUS ON... Teesmouth NNR

Sand, sea and seal pups – the perfect mix for an enjoyable summer day out on one of our coastal National Nature Reserves.

Mike Leakey/English Nature

Common seals haul out at several sites within the reserve

The tidal flats and channels of Teesmouth NNR are home to a breeding colony of around 60 common seals – and the summer months offer a great chance to watch the mothers nursing their new pups, born at the end of June and in early July.

The colony lives on the aptly-named Seal Sands, along with up to 30 grey seals which visit the site regularly throughout the year. Visitors can watch them from one of the two hides overlooking the sands – which can be easily reached by those with pushchairs or wheelchairs.

The reserve, on the north east coast between Middlesbrough and Hartlepool, features several different habitats, including intertidal mud and sand flats, sand dunes, saltmarsh and grazing marsh. It supports large bird populations and, in July and August, you can find up to 1,000 sandwich terns feeding here with their recently-fledged young, before migrating to Africa.

You may also glimpse common blue butterfly, the burnet moth and rare lyme grass moth among the sand dunes around North Gare.

English Nature Site Manager, Mike Leakey, said, "Summer is the best time to enjoy attractive dune flowers, such as purple milk-vetch, that thrive on the North Gare dunes. We have four species of marsh orchid, which make quite a spectacular show during July."

The reserve supports three nationally rare plants – rush-leaved fescue, stiff-leaved saltmarsh grass and brackish water-crowfoot.

A series of grassy mounds around the site serve as a reminder of the area's history. They were formed from ash left over from the salt extraction industry which was important in medieval times.

How to get there

- Teesmouth NNR lies between Hartlepool and Middlesbrough.

English Nature is keen to encourage visitors to arrive by public transport:

- The nearest train station is in Seaton Carew and there are local bus services from the village which pass close to the reserve.
- The NNR is linked to Route 14 of the National Cycle Network at Hartlepool and a recently upgraded section of this route passes through the reserve. There are cycle racks at the North Gare car park.
- Car access is from the A178 with car parks at North Gare and at Cowpen Marsh.

Where to walk

There are a number of good walks around the reserve including a two-mile circular route from the North Gare car park which takes you out towards the breakwater, south along the sands, through the dunes then north through Seaton Common along the cycle path.

English Nature's free Seal Watch events are run in partnership with British Energy, Hartlepool Countryside Wardens and Teesmouth Field Centre.

Phone 01429 853325 for details.

English Nature

A spectacular display of northern marsh orchids at Seaton Dunes and Common

On your bike

English Nature has been working with Sustrans, the green transport campaign group, to encourage more people to cycle to National Nature Reserves. Cycle routes are being created and improved and many NNRs have racks where you can leave your bike before exploring the reserve on foot.

It is easy to cycle to many of English Nature's Spotlight Reserves which are often close to the Sustrans National Cycle Network or other cycle routes:

purestock.com

Enjoying one of the many new cycle routes

NNR	Cycle route
Ainsdale Sand Dunes, Merseyside	On Route 62 (TransPennine Trail) of NCN
Aston Rowant, Oxfordshire	Crossed by the Oxfordshire Cycleway
Castle Eden Dene, Durham	Near Route 1 (Peterlee Link) of NCN
Derbyshire Dales, Derbyshire	Served by sections of NCN
Durham Coast, Durham	Near Route 14 of NCN
Farne Islands, Northumberland	Villages of Seahouses & Bamburgh are near Route 1 (Seahouses & Bamburgh) of NCN
Fenn's Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses, Shropshire	Near Route 45 of NCN
Gait Barrows, Lancashire	On the Regional Route 90 Lancashire Cycleway (an offshoot of Route 6 of NCN)
Holkham, Norfolk	On Route 1 of NCN
Kingley Vale, West Sussex	Near the Cycle Chichester route of NCN
Lindisfarne (Holy Island), Northumberland	Route 1 of NCN
Redgrave and Lopham Fen, Norfolk & Suffolk	Near Regional Route 30 of NCN
Shapwick Heath, Somerset	Near National Route 3 of NCN
Slapton Ley, Devon	Near National Route 2 Coastal alternative
Stodmarsh, Kent	On Route 1 of NCN
Studland and Godlingston Heath	Near to Sandbanks Ferry Link (runs length of Dorset reserve from Swanage via Studland), Purbeck Cycleway and Route 2 of NCN
Wye, Kent	On Route 18 of NCN

For further information about NCN routes visit the Sustrans website **www.sustrans.org.uk/default.asp?sID=1090412763593**

WHAT'S ON?

AUGUST – SEPTEMBER

Aug 09 Bog creatures biodiversity workshop

09.30–16.00 The Manor House,

Fenn's, Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses NNR, Shropshire

Children's event, with Peter Boardman and Ian Cheeseborough. All bugs and creepy crawlies welcome. Advance booking essential.

Contact: Jackie Giles (weekdays) 01743 282000 or Joan Daniels (weekends) 07974 784799

Aug 11 When darkness falls

21.00 Ham Street Woods NNR, Kent

Moth trapping and bat evening. Bring a torch and warm clothing.

Free event. Sorry, no dogs.
Meet at the main entrance.

Contact: Stephen Etherington 07767 321053

Sept 07 Rush cutting

10.00–16.00 Moor House – Upper Teesdale NNR, Durham

Volunteer day. Help cut and gather rushes on Widdybank pasture.

Meet at the gate to Widdybank Farm track, Langdon Beck.

Contact: Moor House – Upper Teesdale Reserve 01833 622374

Sept 19–20 Scrub – the Cinderella habitat?

10.30–11.30 Tues Reading University
09.30–17.00 Wed Reading University

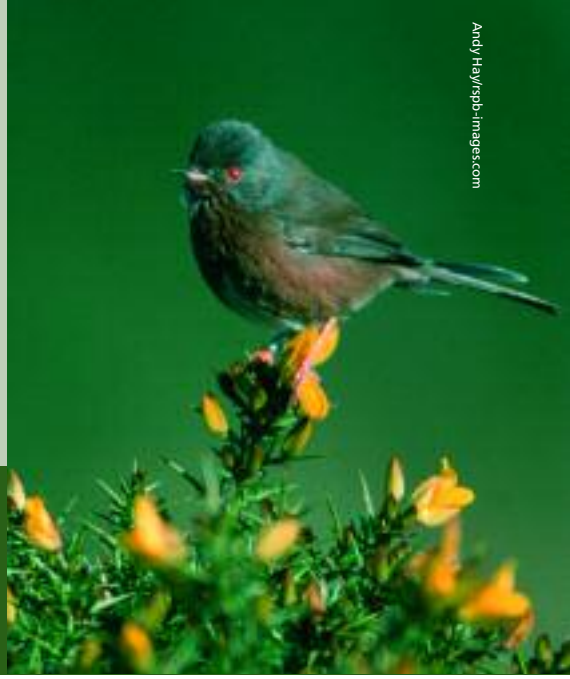
Conference held by the British Ecology Society Conservation Ecology Group, for ecological researchers, conservationists and policy makers.

Chance to explore our understanding of the biodiversity features of scrub and the ecological processes which created them. Discussions on issues of whether to eradicate, control or promote this misunderstood and paradoxical wildlife habitat. Sponsored by English Nature. John Hopkins of English Nature will speak on Diversity of Scrub.

Contact: John Hopkins, English Nature 01733 455123

Action to protect heathland birds

A radical approach is being taken to protect internationally important birds in the face of the housing boom in the south east of England.


Andy Hay/rspb-images.com

The internationally important Dartford warbler

The Thames Basin Heaths have Special Protection Area (SPA) status for their populations of three rare birds – woodlark, nightjar and the Dartford warbler. These ground-nesting birds are vulnerable to disturbance from visitors, residents and pets, as well as damage from fires and other recreational use.


Chris Gomersall/rspb-images.com

The woodlark

There is strong evidence that increasing housing around heathland reduces the number of these birds. Visitors to the SPA come from a wide area, so houses even some distance from the SPA may pose a threat. Proposed new housing in the area – 64,000 new homes – present a real risk to this important wildlife site. The SPA is protected under stringent legislation, which can be onerous for developers and local planning authorities on a case-by-case basis, and presents a potential obstacle to building homes.

English Nature is advising against development closer than 400 m from the Thames Basin Heaths SPA because of the level of the impact. Across the rest of the SPA, English Nature is working on an innovative action plan with local authorities to balance the conservation of these rare birds with the growing need for housing in the area.

"These areas of heathland are now scarce in the south east after years of loss and fragmentation by development, roads and other changes. It is vital that we maintain the areas that are left and protect the special wildlife they harbour," says Rob Cameron, English Nature's Thames and Chilterns Area Manager. "This new approach could mean that residents, greenspace, wildlife and developers can all benefit.

"We accept there is a real need for housing in the area and we are not trying to impose a complete ban. We aim to find solutions that will allow some building to go ahead in the coming months.

"Our aim for the area is to see much-needed development and to have thriving wildlife sites and bird populations set within a restored heathland landscape and new greenspace. This will contribute to an improved quality of life and new recreational areas for local people, a healthy economy and the sustainable development of the Thames Basin Heaths area," he says.

A number of different options for implementing this approach are being explored, and several local planning authorities are pressing ahead with producing 'mini-plans' that will identify greenspace and allow housing permissions to be granted in the interim.

It is important to ensure there are places where people can enjoy nature. The answer, encapsulated in the *Thames Basin Delivery Plan* is to provide alternative greenspaces which will divert visitors away from the SPA. An audit of potential alternative greenspace is being conducted by the South East England Regional Assembly.

LETTER

Dear English Nature,

I am delighted that someone is at last putting nature and environmental concerns before this house-building madness.

The south east is at bursting point, water is in short supply, yet the powers-that-be want to continue fouling our own nest.

You are all to be congratulated for implementing environmental and nature protection regulations in the Thames Basin heathlands.

Tony Fothergill,
Eastbourne

Trading places

English Nature Site Manager, Ben Le Bas, has swapped the rugged landscape of the Peak District for a temporary new life managing the Ravin de Valbois, an internationally protected site in the French Jura.

It is not difficult to guess that Ben has French ancestry. His grandmother Marie-Thérèse was French and his father, Philip, was born near Bordeaux. But although he had visited many times, he had never had the chance to live or work in France and set out for the exchange with no more than a rudimentary knowledge of the language.

His counterpart, Dominique Langlois, has taken his place in the Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve (NNR). So, after a year in their respective new roles, is it a case of 'vive la difference' or have we got much to learn from conservationists across The Channel?

A year in the Jura

Ben takes up the story…

A year managing a French nature reserve? When I read a speculative email sent to English Nature by Dominique Langlois, the conservateur of a Réserve Naturelle in the French Jura, suggesting a job exchange, I knew it was for me.

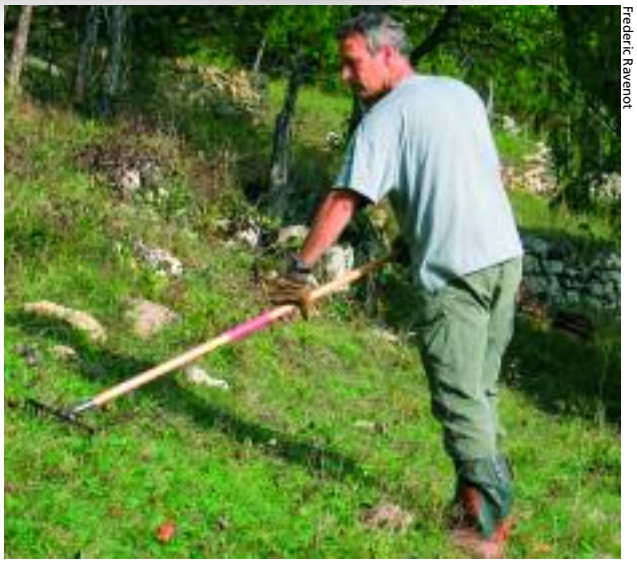
Eighteen months later, in August last year, I found myself living in his house and tentatively taking on the reins of his job.

Our reserves, Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve and the Ravin de Valbois Réserve Naturelle, have a lot in common. Both cover around 300 hectares, both contain fine limestone grasslands, precipitous woodlands, soaring cliffs and clear streams, and both are Natura 2000 sites.

So, superficially at least, we are working on familiar ground, a fact that made the job of selling the exchange idea to our respective organisations that much easier.

Although there are huge contrasts between the small charity I work for here in France and English Nature, the day-to-day life of a reserve manager is not so different. The jobs are equally varied – we both do butterfly transects, scrub clearing, work with volunteers, manage stock, talk to the media, discuss land management with farmers and write reports. The great challenge for each of us has been to do all this in a language which is not our native tongue.

The wildlife here, of course, is just superb. At the moment, we're



Frederic Ravenot

Ben clears up after scrub cutting in an orchid-rich grassland in the Ravin de Valbois. The former vineyard is kept clear of encroaching scrub by manual cutting and three grazing donkeys.

overseeing a wealth of nesting raptors, including peregrines and, for the first time, a pair of red kites. We would have mixed feelings about the arrival of eagle owls, which are not infrequent inhabitants of nearby cliff faces – they are making quite a serious dent in the region's peregrine populations, having developed a taste for their chicks.

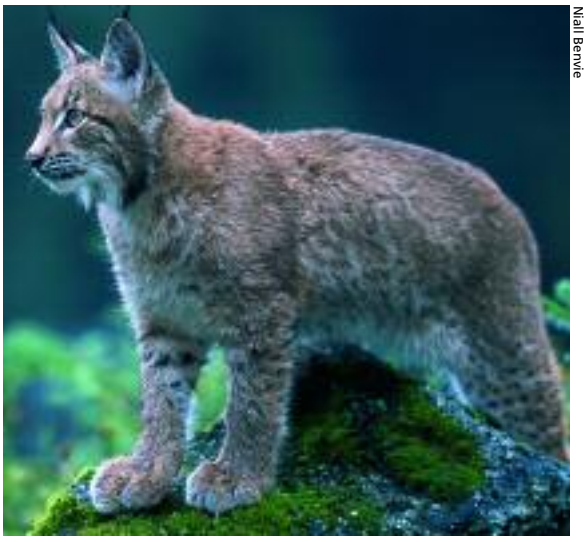
Compared with my job in Derbyshire, I find a stronger focus on pure wildlife issues in French reserves. That's not to say that they don't work with schools or the public. They do, but much of it is purposefully off-site. The principle of 'quiétude' on the reserve is specifically spelt out in the management plan and a considerable effort is made to maintain or improve it.

For instance, there is an objective to persuade the French equivalent of the Ordnance Survey to remove the word 'cascade' from the local map in order to lessen the number of visitors to the depths of the valley. Perhaps it's a shame for the sightseer, but it definitely pays off in terms of the raptors and other animals we have.

We always look for signs of lynx, a relatively recent coloniser of this part of the world which certainly needs the tranquillity we try to provide. We are waiting for wolves to appear in the region, and, who knows, maybe on the reserve too. They're of Italian descent, having made their way up the Apennines to the Swiss Alps, 50 km away. Experts say it won't be long before they're in the French Jura – next winter perhaps, and almost certainly within ten years.

If it sounds enviably fantastic, that's because it is. But, naturally, it's not all good news. France's population density may be half that of the UK, but pressure on the countryside is evident everywhere. Species such as otter and polecat, which are making fine recoveries in much of Britain, still hang in the balance here.

There's little to choose in terms of knowledge, professionalism and dedication between conservation staff on either side of The Channel, but we should count ourselves fortunate in the degree of resourcing and the powerful wildlife legislation that we have in the UK.



Niall Benvie

The European lynx is a recent coloniser

Ben's story

One man's meat...

It's an interesting experience being a naturalist abroad, and I'm rather out of my depth at times. I see things I think are ordinary that turn out to be rarities, and things I think are rare that are as common as can be.

It's different to being on holiday, because here on the exchange I'm a pro. I'm paid to know what's what, my observations are worth something and they carry a gramme of kudos. So when I report a black woodpecker, I can see my colleague's eyes glaze over, but when I casually mention that I found a dead alpine shrew the other day, I'm interrogated, subjected to a lie detector and, having passed, fêted as a local hero.

Pique nique perks

There are small cultural differences between the UK and France…it's exceptional to find a French person who will happily eat their lunch in the field. I'm so used to taking sandwiches out with me that I don't give it a second thought, and in most weathers consider it one of the perks of the job.

Here, many people will put considerable effort into getting back to the office for a good sit-down meal. Fortunately, my closest colleague is one of the exceptions and we spend some happy lunch breaks (he will call them pique niques, though) on the clifftops looking for peregrines and eagle owls, which we frequently see – peregrines at least. Along with the crag martins, the chamois, the kites and migrating black storks.

Meanwhile, back in England, I wonder whether Dominique is now so used to his 'pique niques' that every morning he packs up his snap in his butty box (which is how they put it in Derbyshire).

Out to lunch

A very French lunchtime... at 10.50am the mayor popped into our little office – vaulted ceiling, woodburner (hot-desking here is when your desk is too near the stove) – and asked us to the inauguration of the new village sewage treatment works at 11am. Always game, my colleague and I went along.

There was a substantial turn-out, and speeches were well-received amid the steaming tanks of churning sewage (and reedbeds: it was pretty good actually). Then we were invited to the grand sewage treatment works inauguration lunch at a lovely restaurant, where we had four courses and staggered out at 3pm (I had addressed the mayor as 'tu' which is a bit like calling the queen 'love'). I came away thinking if only we did things like that in England – we just wouldn't, would we?

Toad tales

I spent a pleasant autumn afternoon with our yellow-bellied toads. At first sight they are just small dull grey-green toads but, when turned over, they reveal a startling yellow and black colour scheme. Each

Dominique Langlois

The yellow-bellied toad, turned over to reveal its unique markings

one's markings are as unique as the human fingerprint, so we can check them against reference photos to see if the population is recruiting or not.

The recruitment office was pretty obviously closed last summer as the few we caught were all old hands well-known to the authorities! They have a rather peculiar preference for living in flooded wheel ruts along forest tracks, a lifestyle which presents obvious hazards – no wonder they are decreasing across much of their European range. The reserve population has its own tiny pond duly adjacent to a set of wheel ruts, and they seem to divide their time between the two places.

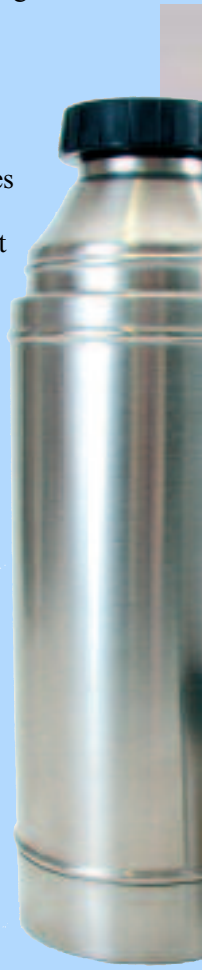
Peak practice

Dominique's tale...

It all began as a family project, with the aim of improving our English and helping our children become bilingual.

In February 2004, I sent 150 emails to UK conservation organisations suggesting an exchange. Two days later, Ben replied. He'd already been thinking along the same lines.

Things quickly developed as we discovered how similar our reserves were, and I soon gained the support of the French Ministry of the Environment for the exchange. My wife took a year's sabbatical, we moved into Ben and Sheena's house and our children enrolled at an English school. We have been made very welcome – and the weather is not all that bad.....

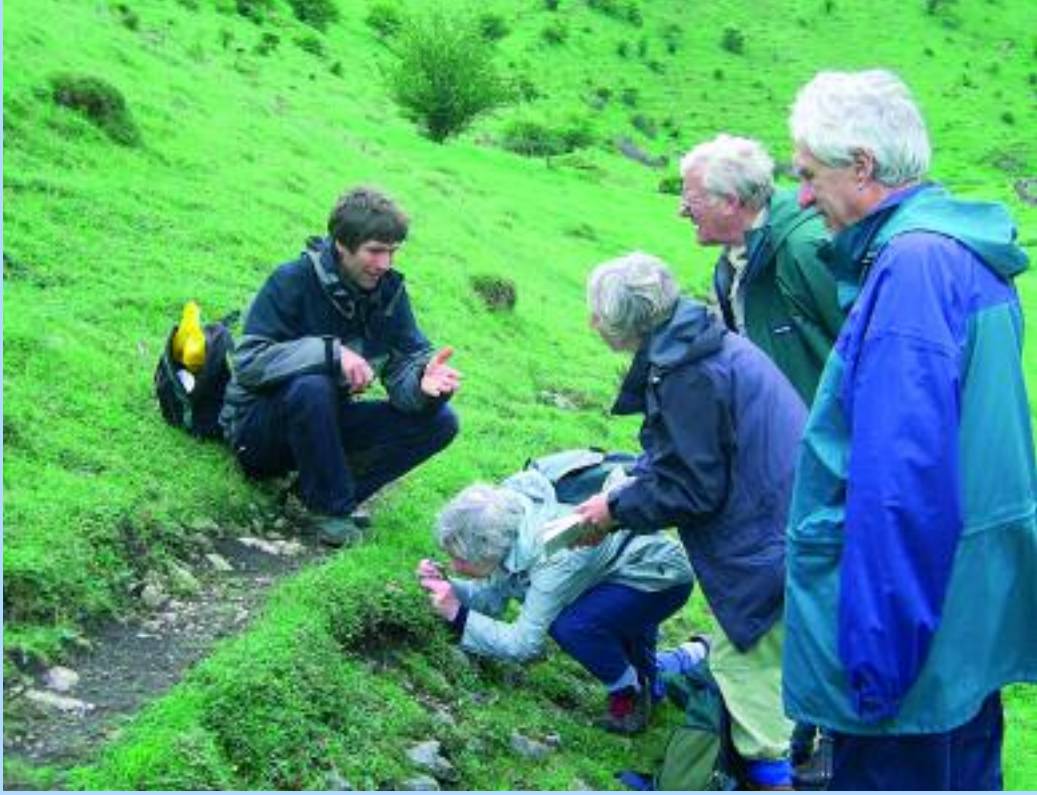


The protection racket

One thing that has really made an impression on me here is the significance of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). We don't have an equivalent in France, where neither our ZNIEFFs (Zones Nationales d'intérêt Ecologique Floristique et Faunistique) nor our Natura 2000 sites have legal protection.

Protecting our biodiversity is the role of volunteers and depends on having enough recruits to safeguard habitats. The British approach is longer-lasting, the basic controls for conservation management are much broader and English Nature has the means to see that the law is respected.

On the other hand, National Nature Reserves are less protected than their equivalents in France (Réserves Naturelles Nationales). English field staff do not have the policing powers of our French staff. In England, reserve management plans and work programmes are not validated by an independent national scientific authority and their management seems to me to be less radical.



Marie-Christine Langlois

Dominique leads a guided walk in Cressbrook Dale

Brooms, weather and water voles

In the course of my stay in England, I have found myself in situations that would be unimaginable for my fellow Juran residents.

I've learned to eat in the reserve vehicles with my colleagues, the windows misted up with the steam from our cups of tea. On windy or rainy days, it has to be the best option!

Rain showers have become almost reassuring though – they always seem to precede sunshine. The problem is, of course, that the sun, in turn, always precedes the next shower. And yet I continue to try to organise my work to suit the weather forecasts – despite them obviously being impossible to get right in such a changeable climate.

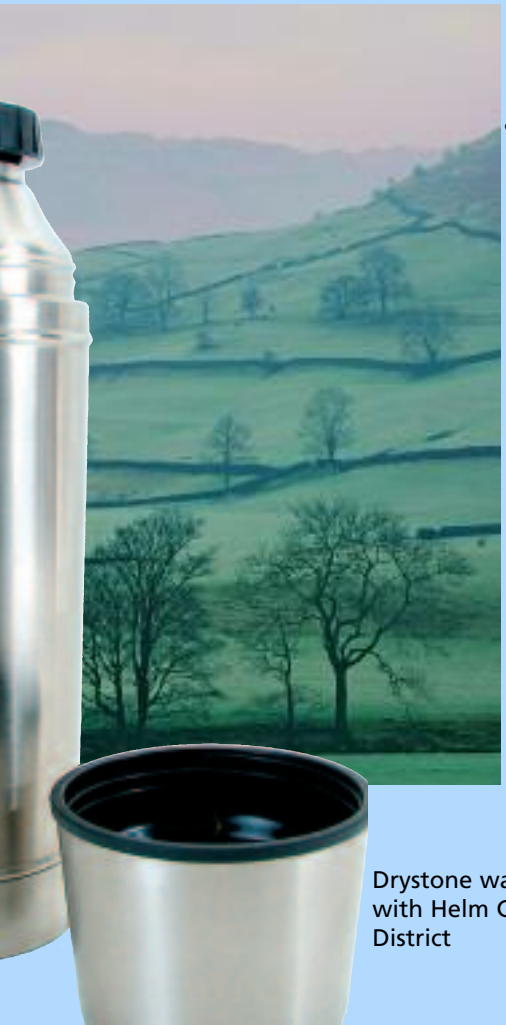
The water vole has completely changed its status. From being the host of a disease (échinococcose – which can be fatal to humans) and the ravager of agricultural land, it's now seen as a remarkable micro-mammal of the riverbanks (I've seen it described as 'so lovely'). I hope Ben continues to trap them on my lawn at home, and isn't tempted to return them safe and well to the countryside!

I've discovered what a fence is, 1,000 km from home. Ben must be really laughing at ours, never tight, always rusty and rarely straight. I've decided to take some of the special tools home – the extraordinary

I've learned to eat in the reserve vehicles with my colleagues, the windows misted up with the steam from our cups of tea. On windy or rainy days, it has to be the best option!

'monkey strainer' (in France, one tightens the fence with a tractor or by hand!) and fencing pliers (we only have pincers, which certainly have their uses but which cut the wire when one wants to twist it). But I definitely remain sceptical on the merits of the British broom, with its angled handle which means you have to bend your back to use it.

I wish every employee could spend a while in a foreign country and benefit from this type of enlightening experience.



Paul Glendell/English Nature

Drystone walls and frosty fields with Helm Crag behind, Peak District

Nick Baker's Wild Ideas

Will Atkinson/LEHART

Common or viviparous lizards are most easily seen

Slippery customers

Adam White

Nick tangles with the formidable reticulated python on his travels in Vietnam

For one specialised group of animals the summer sun is more than a simple pleasure. Reptiles are truly solar-powered.

To function they need to get their bodies up to temperature and that means sunbathing or basking.

It amazes me how little we know about these British natives. While we happily wrestle with our bird, butterfly and dragonfly identification we still get confused by our scaly friends – and there are only six of them!

Part of the problem is that few of us see them as friends. Because real experiences with the creatures themselves are so rare, we believe the myths. And we do have one that can actually deliver a painful bite and a dose of venom!

To restore perspective, we need to get to know them. And to get to know them, we need to get to see them.

When to look is as important as where. When, and how long, they bask depends on the ambient temperature.

On a cold day, with the sun going in and out, they may spend more time out in the open trying to warm up.

You stand the best chance first thing in the morning when snakes and lizards will be cold after the hours of darkness. Days when the air temperature is cool but the sun is coming through are best.

The rarest and most restricted in distribution are the true heathland specialists, the smooth snake and sand lizard. Unless you are on a southern heath, or north west coastal regions around Liverpool, you are unlikely to see the silvered profile of a smooth snake or the dashing emerald flanks of a male sand lizard in his breeding finery.

Peter Wakely/English Nature

The grass snake – a garden visitor

The most easily seen by the casual countryside walker or gardener are the common lizard and the slow worm. Both lizards are widespread and locally abundant.

Nearly all skittish rustlings along an overgrown path can be attributed to the former which takes the shape of a 'proper' lizard with four legs and a tail. The latter is our only legless lizard. It sounds like an inaccurate name but it is actually not bad, as the word 'werm' is old English for a 'snake-like thing'. Of all snake-like things it is definitely the slowest!

Slow worms tend to lurk under cover but can be seen basking and crossing paths. Reveal them in gardens by moving corrugated tin, stones and other debris that provide cover and warmth.

The other two species are the snakes. The grass snake has very southern distribution, gradually petering out the further north you go. This was the most familiar snake to me as a child, as it commonly visited my garden to feed on amphibians in my pond. They nested in early summer in compost heaps and rotting vegetation.

Strangely, the shy adder is the most common and widely distributed of our snakes, found in all manner of wild habitats from woodlands and heath to unimproved grassland where voles, its main prey, are found.

To stand any chance of seeing reptiles you have to train your senses to get past the camouflage which, in the adder's case, is uncannily like leaf litter and the dried bracken litter which it is fond of resting on.

It's also a matter of working several metres in front of you. If you are lucky, you might just get to see the animal fleeing. But stop, get comfy and wait. It will usually come creeping back the moment it thinks you have gone.

The adder is the subject of a recording scheme called 'add an adder' (visit the Herpetological Conservation Trust website **www.adder.org.uk**). If you see the snake or know somewhere they have had a presence, this information should be useful in assessing their status. English Nature is on the lookout for adders as part of a project in the London area. See page 6.

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

Book Review

Flowers in the Fields

A natural history of grassland in The Hudnalls by George F Peterken

Richard Jefferson, Senior Grassland Ecologist, reviews the book

The Hudnalls is an area of small fields, narrow lanes, scattered dwellings, mature hedgerows, hedgerow trees, stone walls and woodland on the Gloucestershire side of the Lower Wye Valley.

Before the 19th century enclosures, The Hudnalls was a large wooded common but, since then, it has become more of a grassland landscape of meadows and pastures. Although the landscape has not been immune to the effects of intensive farming in the last few decades, over 200 hectares of flower-rich neutral grassland still remain there.

The land is privately-owned and none of the grassland is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). However, part of the woodland will be declared as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) in the near future and the area falls within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

George Peterken's book describes the natural history of The Hudnalls grasslands and is well illustrated with colour photographs of landscapes and wildlife and with reproductions of old maps and photographs.

He describes in detail the geology, soils and landscape history of the area, the flora and fauna, and provides guidelines for grassland management.

Of particular significance from a biodiversity conservation perspective, is the description of the Parish Grassland Project which was started by residents of The Hudnalls in 2001. The aims of the project are to raise interest in the landscape and help residents manage and restore flower-rich grassland in their fields.

The project has published a series of guides on key management topics and a regular newsletter and has put up display boards. It has funded the purchase of agricultural equipment which can be transported along narrow lanes and used in small fields.

An important element of this project, and its counterpart in Monmouthshire, is that they were initiated from within the local community.

This book will be of particular interest to people who are, or plan to be, involved in local grassland conservation projects. It will also appeal to anyone interested in landscape and grassland history and wildlife more generally.

Published by the Parish Grasslands Project, Hewelsfield & St Briavels, 2005, ISBN: 0-9551757-0-4, softback, 42pp. Copies available from George Peterken, Beechwood House, St Briavels Common, Lydney, Gloucestershire, GL15 6SL for £5.80 including postage.

The State of Britain's Larger Moths

Butterfly Conservation and Rothamsted Research

The number of moths in Britain has declined by over a third in the last 35 years, with the heaviest losses hitting the south of the country, where they have decreased by 44 per cent.

Two-thirds of common larger moth species are reported to be declining and 71 of our common moths (21 per cent) have suffered losses of more than 30 per cent over the last 10 years. This qualifies them as new Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

These figures reflect an ongoing issue, as 62 moth species have become extinct over the course of the 20th century.

The latest trends, revealed in this landmark publication are described by Sir David Attenborough in his foreword as "significant and worrying."

The report looks at patterns affecting over 300 widespread moths. The information has been gathered from a network of light traps operated by Rothamsted Research since 1968. It is the longest-running, most geographically extensive survey of insects anywhere in the world.

Butterfly Conservation (a charity which protects our wild butterflies, moths and their habitats) outlines how it plans to work with conservation partners like English Nature (and later Natural England) to halt these declines. Action includes proposing 126 new Priority Species; working with Oxford University's research programme to identify the causes; advising on measures to help moths within Environmental Stewardship schemes and seeking funding for a National Moth Recording Scheme to target action and involve the public.

The full-colour 32-page report is illustrated throughout with high quality images of moths. It has been funded by the charitable trust, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Copies of the report, costing £5 + £1.50 p&p can be obtained from **www.butterfly-conservation.org** or by phoning 0870 7744309.

Robert Thompson

The blood-vein moth *Timandra comae* has declined by 79 per cent

Kim's Wilde-life gardening tips


Katrien Vercaigne

Kim in the garden

Pop singer-turned gardening enthusiast, Kim Wilde, shares some secrets from her home, a converted barn in Hertfordshire.

My initial inspiration was to create a garden that would enchant our children, Harry and Rose.

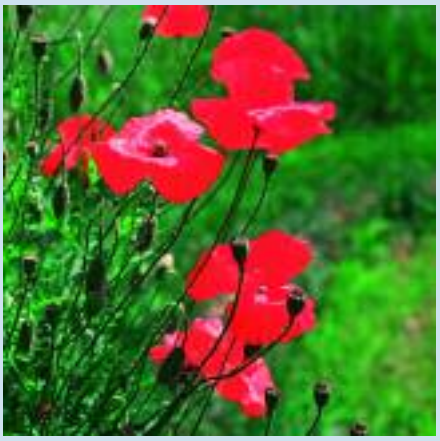
Now gardening for nature has become instinctive to me. My healthy, happy garden is a testament to that and inspires and delights us all. It is a refuge from the stresses of everyday life, a playground, a place to entertain, and where wildlife and family life co-exist easily.

When I began, my instincts told me to keep away from chemicals and pesticides and let nature get on with it. I knew very little about gardening and its relationship to wildlife, but the sight of a butterfly made me swoon, and the sound of birds and bees soothed my senses.

I soon began to appreciate that my garden knew how to look after itself with only a little intervention and, since then, I watched it flourish, fed on good compost and lots of love.

Behind the scenes, an army of hoverflies, ladybirds, beetles, frogs, birds and other wildlife were on the front line, devouring pests and looking after the garden's health – naturally. Over 10 years, I gradually gained the knowledge to help this natural process along by providing food, shelter and water to help these creatures thrive.

A healthy, wildlife-friendly garden starts with its soil. Healthy soil means healthy plants, robust enough to deal with pests and diseases. I have flinty, clay soil that is heavy, cold and sticky in winter and prone to drying out in summer. I have used raised beds and plenty of compost, opening up the soil to assist drainage while keeping moisture locked in during the summer.


Mike Henchman/English Nature

Poppies – easy to grow and a rich source of nectar

I have provided evergreens like holly and ivy for shelter, as well as nectar-rich flowers for all seasons especially winter and early spring. Nectar is a sugar-rich food for beneficial insects like ladybirds, lacewings and hoverflies, giving them energy to breed and fly. They, in turn, lay eggs close to aphid colonies and their larvae helpfully gobble up the aphids.

Winter-flowering plants often have pungent perfumes, so the scent carries through the cold air to lure insects for pollination. I grow several, including *Daphne odora*, winter-flowering honeysuckle *Lonicera fragrantissima*, and witch hazel *Hamamelis sp*.

Early bulbs such as snowdrops and crocus, as well as hellebores and aquilegia are among the flowers that keep nectar supplies going until summer when annuals like pot marigolds *Calendula officinalis*, love-in-a mist *Nigella damascena* and poppies begin to flower along with lavender, roses, and reliable herbaceous geraniums.

Butterflies are always enchanting and are attracted by buddleia, lavender, red valerian, sedum and *Verbena bonariensis* – easy plants to grow which are drought-resistant. I make sure butterflies can lay their eggs and caterpillars can feed by leaving big patches of stinging nettles at the bottom of the garden.

I've slowly been turning an adjacent field into woodland. Each winter, locally-sourced birch, hornbeam and hazel saplings are planted along with oak, lime and holly. I've had the hedgerows replanted with hawthorn, field maple and wild roses.

Creating a wildlife-friendly garden can be achieved in many ways – in all shapes and sizes no matter how small. From wood piles in shady corners to attract slug-munching ground beetles and hedgehogs, to simple bird baths – we can all help wildlife.