



Bedfordshire  
Cambridgeshire  
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wildlifebcn

# Wild Places

*A Newsletter for Owners and Managers of  
Wildlife Sites*

[www.wildlifebcn.org](http://www.wildlifebcn.org)

2016

*Welcome to the seventh issue of the Wildlife Sites Newsletter. This newsletter is for owners and managers of Bedfordshire's County Wildlife Sites. County Wildlife Sites (CWS) are areas of land where species and habitats flourish because of past and current management and are the most important areas for wildlife outside legally protected sites such as SSSIs. There are 403 CWS in Bedfordshire - these cover roughly 7% of the county's area—and create a network of habitats across the county. They do not have statutory protection and it is through the goodwill of their owners and managers that the sites are conserved and retain their wildlife value.*



## **County Wildlife Sites (CWS) update**

The wildlife sites project continues apace with a successful survey season last summer. In total 25 sites were surveyed including some which had not been visited for over 20 years! The sites included woodlands, meadows and wetlands, most retained due to the hard work of the landowners. Working closely with different organisations (more about that later) has meant that many sites have been restored or brought into improved management.

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## Our partnership project with Arqiva — 10 years on

The Wildlife Trust works in partnership with corporate members Arqiva. Laura Downton (Living Landscape Manager) tells us what wildlife improvements have been achieved by working together.

Every year we work on this County Wildlife Site (CWS) with a local grazer who grazes his sheep during the summer. We also help to organise a hay cut.

This site was recognised as a CWS in 1990 for the species rich grassland that it contained. However, the grassland had gradually declined in quality since it was recognised. 10 years ago, Arqiva asked the Wildlife Trust to help them to restore this site. Traditional management began at this point, and we have carried out botanical surveys each year to record how the grassland has changed.

Since the project began there have been some really positive changes in the sward and I wanted to highlight a few of these here:

- A reduction in the dominance of false oat grass. The grassland is composed of a more even mixture of herbs and grasses.
- Bramble encroachment has been prevented by a combination of grazing and/or cutting at the right time of year.
- Noticeable reductions in creeping thistle (an invasive species) to an acceptable level.
- Spread in the number of plants indicative of agriculturally unimproved species rich grasslands, such as: adder's tongue fern, black knapweed, common bird's foot trefoil, agrimony, fairy flax, lady's bedstraw, grass vetchling and common spotted orchid.
- Increase in the number of butterflies on site, with record numbers of marbled white and common blue.

This project is set to continue - so watch this space for more records.



# Funding to enhance the natural and built heritage in the Greensand Country

The Greensand Country Landscape Partnership, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is working to reverse the gradual decline in the landscape character and local distinctiveness of the Greensand Country and is working as a community led partnership to sustain the area's distinctive natural and built heritage.

A small grant scheme will enable third parties such as landowners, farmers, land managers and local communities to secure funding for their own heritage projects, which will enhance and sustain the natural, historic and built environment at a landscape scale and leave a legacy which reverses the gradual decline in the area's landscape character.

The third party grant scheme follows four themes:

**Natural heritage:** Funding for the priority habitats found within the Greensand Country, primarily heathland, acid grassland, woodland (including wet woodland), parkland and neutral grassland. Funding can be applied for to enhance and improve existing habitats, enlarge sites, create new sites and join sites up through creating ecological corridors.

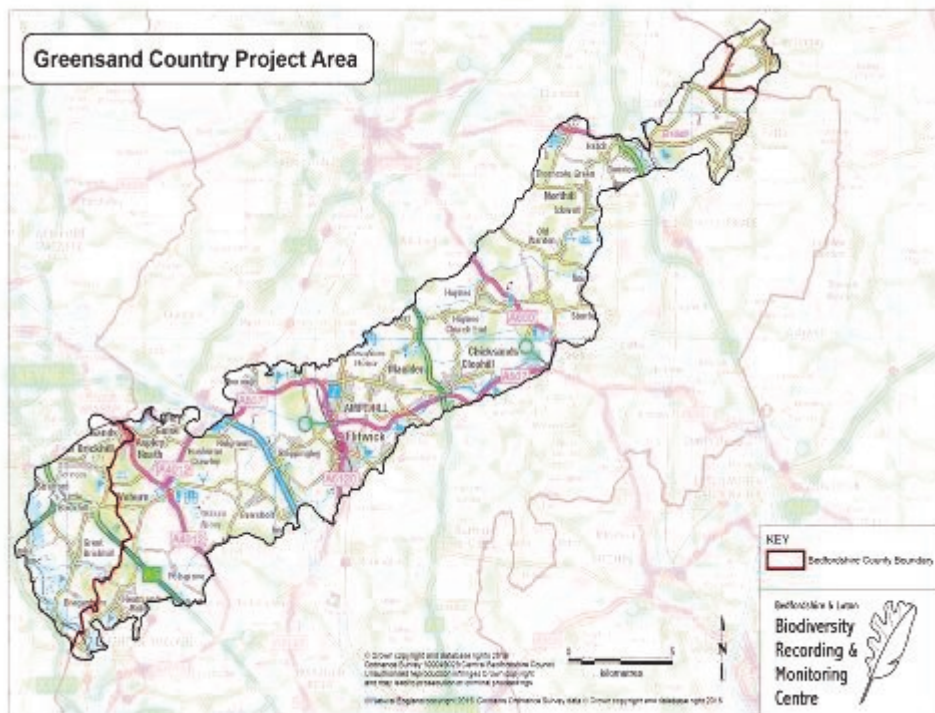
**Sandstone Structures:** Walls, church arches, houses and churches in the Greensand Country are built from the distinctive Greensand bedrock, but many of these are in decline and their loss would affect the local distinctiveness of some parts of the area. A grant fund is available to conserve and restore minor sandstone structures.

**Community heritage:** Communities are invited to apply for funding to carry out projects which enhance our understanding of the heritage or improve the management of heritage of the area.

**Historic Parklands:** The Greensand Country has more historic parklands than any other National Character area in Britain. Yet changes in agricultural practices have caused fragmentation of the historic parks, resulting in loss of landscape character. Funding is available to help us enhance our parklands and retain their huge influence on our sense of place.

By applying for this funding local communities, farmers and landowners will become part of a wider partnership which will make a difference at a landscape scale in the Greensand Country, creating a living and working landscape that is cherished by present and future generations, and an area where we will have begun to reverse the gradual decline in the landscape character.

If you would like more information about funding opportunities please contact **Claire Poulton** on [clairep@bedsrcc.org.uk](mailto:clairep@bedsrcc.org.uk)



# CWS in Living Landscapes

Nature reserves will always be a vital part of any strategy for conserving wildlife. However, they are typically small, isolated islands in a sea of urban and farmed land which, if managed without care for wildlife, can be a hostile place for many species. By themselves, reserves can never be enough to secure the future of British wildlife.

This is why we need a new approach to nature conservation. We're calling it Living Landscapes. Since 2006, the Wildlife Trusts have been working together with farmers and landowners, members of the public, and other organisations to create landscapes in which people and wildlife can coexist.

A Living Landscape is one which includes plenty of thriving, biodiverse areas outside traditional nature reserves. It is crisscrossed by broad corridors of wildlife-friendly habitat, so wildlife is free to move around and can quickly colonise new areas. Populations are no longer isolated on reserves, which reduces the chance of local extinction.

County Wildlife Sites host some of the most unique habitats and rarest species our country has left, so they are a key part of this vision. They make our landscape more connected and act as reservoirs from which rare species can recolonise surrounding areas. In short, they are essential if we are to build a Living Landscape for future generations to enjoy.



# Why do CWS matter?

From mystical ancient woodlands to quiet churchyards and bustling flower-rich roadsides; the UK enjoys special, often unnoticed, wild places where nature thrives - County Wildlife Sites (CWS). Also known as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) these valuable habitats cover 7% of Bedfordshire – (compared to SSSI coverage of just 1.1%). These sites are also a vital component in our Living Landscapes (see article on left). The diagram below illustrates some of the reason why they matter.



To highlight their national and local importance, The Wildlife Trusts have produced a guide which can be downloaded. We have also produced four short videos of CWS landowners speaking about their experiences of owning and managing these sites. To see the leaflet and watch the videos go to [www.wildlifetrusts.org/localwildlifesites](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/localwildlifesites)





## Lowland Calcareous Grasslands

are a priority habitat in Bedfordshire and are included in the County Wildlife Site guidelines to allow the best sites to be recognised as CWS. Currently, we have 33 sites (out of 403) that have been recognised as a CWS for this habitat.

These grasslands have developed on shallow lime-rich soils generally overlying limestone rocks, including chalk. They grow below an altitude of 250 metres, mainly in the warmer, drier south and east of the UK. Typically, this type of habitat is found on dry valley slopes, although it can develop in neglected chalk and limestone quarries, railway cuttings and along roadside verges. In Bedfordshire this grassland is predominantly associated with the steep scarp slopes of the Chilterns chalk in the south of the county, although, there are scattered sites in the north. A careful search can reveal up to 40 species of flowering plants in one square metre.

Current estimates suggest that only 33,000-41,000 hectares of lowland calcareous grassland remain in the UK. In Bedfordshire, this habitat has declined by over 50% in the last 50 years and only about 300 hectares now remains. Scrub encroachment appears to be a major threat to the condition of Bedfordshire's calcareous grasslands. Because of the steep decline this habitat is included in the latest Bedfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan. This means that targets have been set to arrest the current decline and to restore existing sites to good condition.

Management by extensive grazing with sheep and/or cattle is vital for conserving the unique flora and fauna of calcareous grassland. Where grazing is not an option, a hay cut of the grassland during the summer is the best possible alternative. Scrub should be prevented from invading areas of open pasture, but some scattered scrub should be allowed as it supports its own invertebrate fauna. For more information about management please contact Laura Downton (see back page). The Bedfordshire CWS criteria can be found on the BRMC website:







Drone in action at Pegsdon  
Grassland © Laura Downton

## Scrub Off project update

This is a Biffa Award funded project to restore calcareous grassland CWS around the North Chiltern Chalk area, providing a network of sites for many rare and declining species to survive and move in the face of climate change. As the name suggests the project focussed on the restoration of grassland features by tackling scrub and introducing management.

Some scrub is important for a range of wildlife including invertebrates and birds, however left unchecked it will over-shade and out-compete areas of wildflowers. Scrub clearance will focus on restoring and increasing the best areas of grassland within a site to conserve wildflowers and create a mosaic of habitats for wildlife.

### Case studies

**Pegsdon Grassland CWS:** The Wildlife Trust drone was flown over the site to take aerial pictures of the scrub and grassland mosaic. The aerial pictures will be used to direct where best to target the scrub clearance work this winter.

**Wentworth Fields CWS:** Encroaching scrub was cleared from within three field. Fencing was also installed to enable horse grazing of an area of the calcareous grassland, which previously could not be grazed. The fencing will allow this field to be managed in the long term by low intensity horse grazing which will improve the condition.

**Hudnall Field CWS:** Several days were spent clearing encroaching scrub from within the CWS and spot treating the stumps to prevent regrowth. This will enable more wide scale grazing with sheep to restore and maintain this calcareous grassland in the long term.

# Yardley Whittlewood Ridge

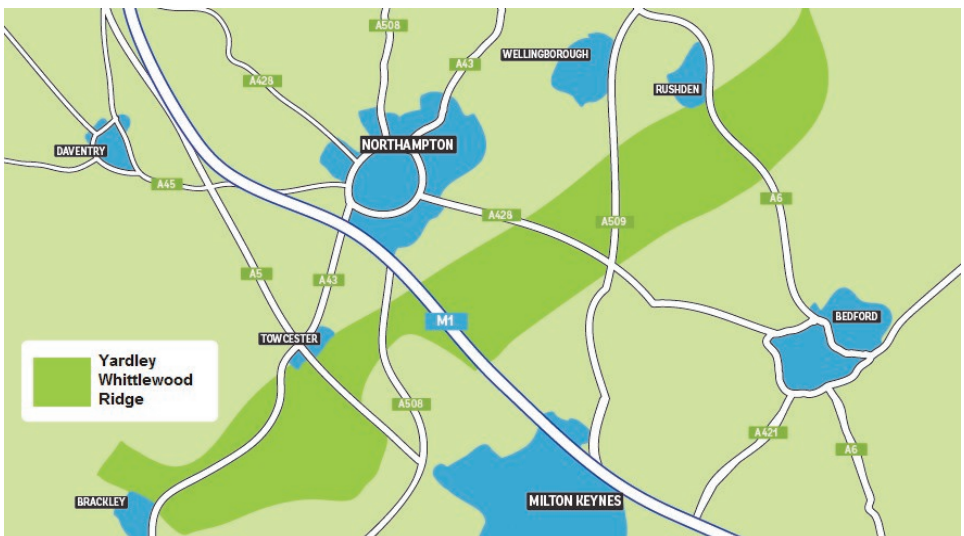
The Woodland Trust is working with partners, such as BCN Wildlife Trust and landowners to increase woodland cover on the Yardley Whittlewood Ridge. Trees and woods are an integral part of a resilient landscape, and we value them for their beauty, their wildlife and a range of more practical benefits such as timber production, woodfuel, game cover and improving land values. Creating a diverse landscape with a mix of native, broadleaved trees is vital to mitigate against the impact of tree pests and diseases.

What can you do to help?

- Plant individual trees within hedges or in fields, they act as stepping stones for wildlife;
- Create wildlife corridors – new hedgerows provide habitat in their own right and enable species to move between core areas to feed, migrate or reproduce;
- Make existing woods bigger – buffer zones protect special woodlands from external pressures such as agricultural spray drift; and allow the species within them space to expand;
- Create new woods – new woodland areas help to connect existing ones and make wildlife movements across the landscape easier.

The Woodland Trust is keen to help with advice and funding for any tree or hedge planting (including gapping up) in this special area (see map below), and offers a range of financial incentives to encourage planting more native trees.

Please get in touch to hear more about our aspirations and to take part in improving this special part of Bedfordshire: email [plant@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:plant@woodlandtrust.org.uk) or call 0343 770 5689



# Gourmet grub for giraffes



A happy union has been forged between vital conservation work at Galsey Wood CWS in the north of Bedfordshire and the dietary needs of grazing animals at ZSL Whipsnade Zoo.

Ben Poulton of Acer Conservation (based at Sandy, Acer specialise in managing all aspects of wildlife habitat) had the idea of sending the wood and branches from tree maintenance work done to the giraffes at Whipsnade (plus gorillas, okapi and colobus monkeys at London Zoo). Tender shoots and twigs of shrubs and trees, known as browse, provide additional food for some species, while logs and branches become play-things and bedding for others, serving to enrich their environments.



Logs, branches and leaves have been cut at Galsey Wood owned by Palmers Autodrome. Once at the zoo the leafy branches are hung for the animals to browse; volunteers have also been packing barrels of silage from the trees as winter feed.

Laura Downton, Living Landscape Manager for Bedfordshire said: "Thinning and coppicing some of the trees provides more space, and sunlight can reach the woodland floor to encourage flowers to grow and an understory to develop. The woodland is better managed and the giraffes and other animals get nutritious fresh branches to eat!"

Ben Poulton from Acer Conservation said: "We've worked closely with ZSL improving browse provision at Whipsnade. I've been keenly aware that there was potential for an opportunity to tie in the work that we carry out managing woodlands and grasslands to the benefit of both. Once given the opportunity to supply browse, to ZSL London Zoo and Whipsnade, the benefits and sustainability of this project soon became excitingly apparent. To be able to carry out so much work helping restore and manage these sites for improved biodiversity - whilst providing fresh browse - has been one of the most satisfying projects we've undertaken."



Trailer load of brush on its way to the zoo © Esther Clarke

# Contacts



Bedfordshire  
Cambridgeshire  
Northamptonshire

**Laura Downton** from the Wildlife Trust can:

- Conduct a wildlife survey of your site
- Provide advice on grants that may be available to you and apply for them on your behalf
- Provide 'whole farm' conservation advice

Website: [www.wildlifebcn.org/wildlife-sites-bedfordshire](http://www.wildlifebcn.org/wildlife-sites-bedfordshire)

Tel: 01234 364213 or 07734 478449

Email: [laura.downton@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:laura.downton@wildlifebcn.org)

Address; The Wildlife Trust, Priory Country Park, Barkers Lane, Bedford, MK41 9DJ

## Other Useful Contacts

Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre based in Bedford, has been set up to gather, store and share information on Bedfordshire and Luton's wild species, habitats and protected sites. Email: [brmc@bedsbionet.org.uk](mailto:brmc@bedsbionet.org.uk); Website: [www.bedsbionet.org.uk](http://www.bedsbionet.org.uk) Tel: 01234 355435

We hope that you have found this newsletter useful and interesting. General comments and suggestions for future articles are very welcome. If you would prefer to receive future newsletters via email, then please contact **Laura Downton** at the above telephone number, email or address.