



Bedfordshire  
Cambridgeshire  
Northamptonshire



/wildlifebcn

# Wild Places

**A Newsletter for Owners and  
Managers of Wildlife Sites**  
[www.wildlifebcn.org](http://www.wildlifebcn.org)

**2019**

# Welcome to the tenth 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 406 CWS in Bedfordshire – these cover over 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.

## Update on the **Environment Bill** and **Agriculture Bill**.

Both began their journey through parliament only to have to begin again with the new government. Both bills could offer improvements in protection compared to current EU law, and the Wildlife Trusts, as part of Greener UK, will continue to push for ambitious new laws for nature’s recovery and support for farmers to restore our wild places. Visit [wildlifebcn.org/wilder-future](http://wildlifebcn.org/wilder-future) for more info.



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## Woodland

If you manage a woodland, are considering applying for or are currently in a scheme consider signing up to the Forest Commissions [Grants and Regulations newsletter](#).

## Ash Dieback

Forest Research have recently released a [leaflet](#) on their guidance surrounding ash dieback.

Salient points for management:

- Give some thought to the current situation, to prepare any actions that might be necessary to take and amend management plans if necessary.
- A felling licence is required to fell a diseased Ash (however health and safety concerns take priority).
- Felling uninfected ash trees should be avoided if possible, leaving them increases the likelihood of ash trees developing resistance to the disease.
- Additional restrictions apply to SSSIs and AONBs.

## Agri-Environment Schemes

Defra have agreed as a useful and simple short term measure in anticipation of the New Environmental Land Management Scheme (NELMS) that Natural England are able to approve one year extensions to existing Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS), which are due to expire over the next year.

For more information and to check whether you might be eligible please visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/higher-level-stewardship-hls-2020-agreement-extension>.

Some information on the NELMS has been made publically available via the CLA (Country Land and Business Association) website (search for '[ELM](#)').

Trials are currently ongoing, the national pilot will begin late 2021 with the scheme ready for a full roll out in 2024.

The schemes come in three tiers, relating to the focus and scale of the projects:

- 1 - An entry level scheme based on payment for sustainable farming practices, e.g. grassland management.
- 2 - A mid-level targeted environmental enhancement scheme, following local priorities, e.g. wildlife habitat creation.
- 3 - Complex landscape scale scheme, forming partnerships, following national objectives, e.g. wetland restoration.

# A Swift Decline

*The arrival of our Swifts, Swallows and House Martins heralds the start of summer. Swifts arrive in early May, from their winter quarters in Africa, and depart at the end of August to early September after breeding.*

*But Swifts are in trouble; the population in the UK more than halving since 1995. Part of the reason is the loss of nest sites through unsympathetic roofing works and the replacement of soffits with plastic that remove the nest access points for swifts.*

**The Bedfordshire Swift Group** aims to increase our knowledge of where swifts are breeding in the county. To encourage their protection by giving information and looking for ways to retain nest sites and make new ones to replace those lost.

Swifts spend most of their lives in the air, eating, drinking, sleeping and mating on the wing only landing to nest and rear their young. They nest in small spaces mainly beneath roof tiles or eaves.

Their nests are minimal, they generally leave no mess as they keep their nests clean. You may not even realise that you have them.

Swifts are relatively long-lived and are faithful to their nest sites, and if these are lost they may not be able to breed.

Swifts, unlike Swallows and House Martins are dark, with no obvious white patches, they never perch as swallows do on overhead wires.

Swifts are distinctive in flying at speed at rooftop height, usually in groups, calling in excited high pitched “screams”.



The Bedfordshire Swift Group would like you to tell us where you see calling swifts flying low around houses and other buildings.

This means they are likely to be nesting in one of more rooves or eaves.

Please **make a rough count**...counting can be quite hard as they can fly at nearly 70 miles an hour.

If you see a swift swooping into a crevice or beneath tiles. The Swift Group can provide more information about these birds and how to keep them.

If roof works are needed there are easy ways to retain access points for swifts, and provide more nesting opportunities by putting up nest boxes.

There are several ways to make a record when you think you have located a breeding colony:

- Northamptonshire Biodiversity Record Centre <https://www.wildlifebcn.org/swifts>

If you prefer to contact another organisation:

- You can let the Bedfordshire Swift group know by emailing [graham@gcbellamy.plus.com](mailto:graham@gcbellamy.plus.com)
- Or let the Wildlife Trust know by emailing [bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org)
- The RSPB also runs an on-line survey at <https://swiftsurvey.org/RSPB/home/Index>

Further information about Action for Swifts can be found at:

<http://actionforswifts.blogspot.com>



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# Funding for Pond Creation and Management

Developers in the South Midlands are able to speed up the planning application process and save money by choosing to pay into a Great Crested Newt (GCN) compensation fund, rather than going through the normal lengthy processes of newt surveys and mitigation. This is part of a new Government-approved approach to the conservation of GCN called **District Licensing**.

The **Newt Conservation Partnership** uses the funds from developers to create and manage high quality habitat for GCN, including both ponds and terrestrial habitat. Landowners receive an **annual payment** to maintain the ponds and the terrestrial habitat (the 'compensation sites') in the long-term.

**The Newt Partnership are currently looking for potential sites across Bedfordshire.**

## What are the criteria?

Preferable conditions:

- Approximate surface area 400-880 m<sup>2</sup>
- Great crested newts found within 1 km
- Unpolluted water source
- Fish Free
- Surrounding land should include:
  - Woodland
  - Scrub
  - Rough grassland
  - Hedge network

Manage existing ponds by:

- Restoring 'lost' ponds
- Managing trees
- Removing fish
- Re-profiling margins



**Good locations for compensation sites include wet areas on heavy clay land - often poor for farming.**



## Who pays for habitat creation and site management in the longer term?

All the costs of habitat creation and management are fully funded by the Newt Partnership. Participating landowners sign a 5-year rolling management agreement, which can be renewed for at least a 25-year period. The agreement sets out **annual payments to compensate for any income lost and to cover management costs**. The rate of annual payments to landowners is decided on a site by site basis. Newt Partnership staff will visit the site once a year for monitoring, and to assess the need for management.

## What if you change your mind after the ponds are created?

The agreement between landowners and the Newt Partnership is **reviewed every 5 years**, at which time landowners can opt out of the scheme.

## What if you want to sell the land where ponds have been created or managed?

There are **no restrictions** on selling land which contain newt compensation sites, as long as the buyer takes on the scheme for the remaining period of the agreement. If this is not the case, then the annual fee paid so far under the 5-year agreement may need reimbursing.

## Will the presence of Great Crested Newts affect farming or other activities on your landholding as a whole?

**No.** The purpose of this new approach is to ensure that GCN are thriving across the South Midlands as a whole, and unnecessary bureaucratic restrictions are reduced. A thriving population of GCN will be viewed as a positive sign of successful land management.

For further information contact The Newt Partnership at:

[www.newtpartnership.org.uk](http://www.newtpartnership.org.uk)

or to hear about the whole scheme, visit NatureSpace at:

[www.naturespaceuk.com](http://www.naturespaceuk.com)

# Ouse Valley Farmer Cluster

A farmer cluster is a group of neighbouring farmers who are willing to collaborate in their farming approach, share best practice and join together to achieve a truly wildlife-rich farmed landscape. By working together, it is possible to have a much bigger and better impact for local wildlife.

In Bedfordshire, a farmer cluster group has been set up in the Ouse Valley around Bedford thanks to funding recently awarded through Defra's Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. This group will be facilitated by Rebecca Inman from FWAG East with the support of the Wildlife Trust BCN. The facilitator will work directly with farmers and landowners by organising, for example, discussion groups, training meetings and workshops.

By working together as a group, farmers could help deliver local priorities in a more joined up way including:

- Improving water quality in the River Ouse for fish and insects.
- Flood Risk Management to help alleviate flooding further downstream, reduce the amount and rate of surface water runoff and reduce soil erosion.
- Maintaining/restoring/creating/linking the following priority habitats: ancient and native woodland; riparian habitats associated with the Bedford Ouse; arable field margins.
- Providing improved habitat for the following key farmland species: corn bunting; lapwing; grey partridge; tree sparrow; turtle dove; yellow wagtail.
- Maintenance and restoration of hedgerows, hedgerow trees, in-field trees, bankside trees and ponds.



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Working collaboratively, members will gain a better awareness of how their farming operations can impact on the wider environment and how they can create a more coherent and joined up landscape network, allowing for improved movement of species and quality of water.

At present, about 20 farmers and landowners have become members but more are welcome to join. If you manage land in the Bedford Ouse catchment and are interested in finding out more please get in touch.

## Contact

FWAG East, Rebecca Inman;

T: 01223 841507;

E: [rebecca.inman@fwageast.org.uk](mailto:rebecca.inman@fwageast.org.uk)

Wildlife Trust BCN, Laura Downton;

T: 01234 364213;

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



## For more information

Farmer Clusters - <https://www.farmerclusters.com/>

Defra's Facilitation Fund - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-facilitation-funding>

Don't miss out!

East of England Farming Conference - 5th November 2020

# Habitat Focus - Hedgerows

Maintaining a healthy hedge benefits both you and the local environment:

- Hedges will grow back thicker after being laid or coppiced.
- Can be stock proof when laid.
- Form habitat corridors that connect woodlands together.
- Flowers and fruits are a vital food source for wildlife.
- Provides habitat for birds, pollinators, butterflies, invertebrates that control pest species, etc.
- Insects and small mammals inhabiting the hedge become food for predators higher in the food chain.

Hedgerows need management to remain in good health. Periods of non-intervention can be beneficial however if these are extended the health will begin to deteriorate, making it harder, and therefore more costly, to reinstate or bring the hedgerow back under control.

Hedge laying is part of the 25 - 40 year cycle of management for a healthy hedgerow. There are a few techniques that can be used to extend the periods between the hedge laying or coppicing. Good practice is to treat the hedgerow in sections which are on rotation through the management cycle. This spreads the cost and labour of laying the hedges ensuring that the task does not exceed your capacity for the year.

The effective management varies depending on the stage the hedgerow is currently in. Using the resources provided by Hedgelinek, detailed overleaf, the hedgerow should be assessed against the 10 point scale and the relevant management carried out. The stages are dictated by the heights of the trees, their density, height of new shoots, thickness of stems.

The most important aspect of good hedgerow management is to gradually raise the height at which the hedge is cut each time.

When creating or restocking a hedge consider a varied mix native species e.g. spindle, hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, field maple, dogwood, guilder rose. Often any funding for the maintenance will be tied to the mix of species being native.

Contact Colin Carpenter at Torminalis Horticultural Services T:07751356094 (or visit his website at [bedfordshiretrees.co.uk](http://bedfordshiretrees.co.uk)) for advice and the provision of:

- Hedge restoration.
- Hedge laying and coppicing.
- Training in hedge laying.
- Supply of native species.

Hedgeline resources - <http://hedgeline.org.uk/> E: enquiries@hedgeline.org.uk

To contribute to the national statistics while getting tailored management advice take part in the Great British Hedgerow Survey run by the People's Trust for Endangered Species - <https://hedgerowsurvey.ptes.org/>



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# Contacts



**Bedfordshire  
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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: <https://www.wildlifebcn.org/what-we-do/nature-recovery-network/local-wildlife-sites/bedfordshire>

Tel: 01234 364213

Email: [bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org)

Address To: Conservation Officer

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 The Wildlife Sites Officer at the above telephone number, email or address.

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