



Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire



wildlifebcn

Wild Places

A Newsletter for Owners and
Managers of Wildlife Sites

2017



Welcome to the eighth 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

Another year and another strong survey season last summer. In total 30 sites were surveyed. 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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River Wardens – A UBOCP Scheme



What are they?

Volunteer river wardens are the eyes and ears of the rivers and brooks in Bedfordshire and some of the surrounding counties. The scheme, established this summer, aims to monitor the health and features of our beloved and essential rivers and brooks.

What do they do?

These wardens undertake regular surveys (once every 1 to 3 months) of an assigned stretch to see if there have been any major changes in the river such as bank slips or large woody vegetation that has come down. They also keep their eyes peeled for any species of interest such as water voles and otters or any emerging invasive non-native species that may appear

What is this information used for?

The data collected by our eager volunteers is used in multiple ways. Certain invasive non-native species information is passed on to the Environment Agency so they can tackle it.

Native as well as non-native species information is sent to the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre where it is included in a species database, this allows for easy mapping and long term distribution monitoring of species so we can see what is doing well and what isn't. This species information along with the other data gathered will also help to inform any projects associated with the river systems so it can be seen where action might need to be taken to help improve the habitat and strengthen numbers of species.

What can they do for you?

Want to know more about the river or stream that flows through your land? River wardens can be an invaluable resource for data collection, surveying for a range of criteria mentioned in the previous paragraph. This information can be shared with you so that you can have a better understanding of one of the most important habitat types and inform any actions you wish to take to help better protect our river systems.

For more information about the project, or if you are interested in having a river warden regularly survey a stretch of river or stream on your land, go to ubocp.org.uk/get-involved/river-wardens/ or contact Lewis Dickinson (contact details on back page).

Greensand Country Landscape Partnership Living Heaths/Working Woodlands Grant Scheme

The purpose of the Grant Scheme is to create or restore our Priority Habitats (lowland heathlands, acidic grasslands, neutral grasslands and woodlands) in areas where there is a natural and historic context for them, and to bring these sites into positive management.

The restoration and creation of smaller but numerous sites will collectively create 'green corridors' and 'stepping stones' of habitat across the Greensand Country Landscape. Alongside grant opportunities for habitat restoration and creation the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership (GCLP) programme is offering advice and training on land management.

The GCLP is calling for a wide range of partners including farmers and land owners/managers, community groups, churches and other faith communities, schools and other stakeholders to propose projects that create or restore these priority habitats .

The scheme can provide grants of between £500 to £15,000 and can cover up to 70% of your project's total cost.

You can propose projects which involve:

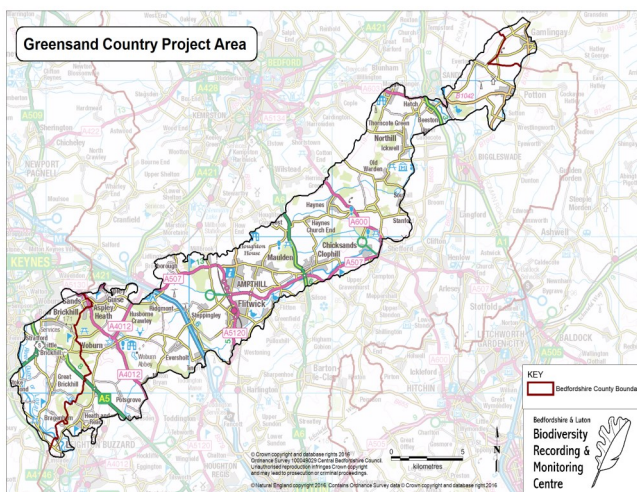
- Woodland/hedgerow planting
- Creation of wildflower meadows
- Linking habitats at the farm scale
- Heathland and acid grassland restoration
- Improved management of existing habitats
- Introduction of conservation grazing as a management technique

For more information or an informal chat about a project idea contact
Jon Balaam at the Greensand Trust on:

01234 744592

To apply for funding:

- 1) Email the Greensand Trust (working with the Landscape Partnership Team to promote these grants): jon.balaam@greensandtrust.org with a brief description (no more than 200 words) of your project and location.
- 2) We will arrange a meeting and a site visit to talk about your project and get more details, and provide you with a follow-up report with recommendations.
- 3) The report will help you complete an 'Expression of Interest' form.
- 4) A panel will then consider your application.
- 5) If they are happy for your project to proceed, we will ask you to put together more detailed information, which the panel will look at again



Greensand
Country



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Monitoring Technique—Fixed Point Photography

Fixed point photography (FPP) is a technique that is growing in popularity as a way of monitoring the changes of a subject over time. The core idea of FPP is to identify a subject be it a habitat type or a feature, for example a meadow or a piece of woody debris in the river, and monitor it over time using photography.

One of the main benefits of FPP is that it gives you a visual record of change over time and can be an excellent way of supplementing more traditional forms of monitoring. It has particular use in monitoring the after effects of a project on its surroundings.

For example a project installing woody debris in the river could be monitored long term to see how the woody debris affects the water flow, the river banks, the river bed, and the feature itself.

Another use could be using FPP to supplement surveying by monitoring survey locations for change in vegetation structure. By monitoring the survey locations it is possible to potentially identify any changes in the surroundings that may be causing variation in the numbers of species surveyed.

The most difficult part about FPP is managing the data, but don't let that put you off! All that is essentially needed is to make sure you date and label the photos (with location and direction) and store them in an appropriate folder along with a map locating where the photos of that fixed point were taken. Additional methods to enhance the data storage include use of a spreadsheet register to hold extra data about the fixed points and their photographs.

For more information on how you can start up FPP monitoring take a look at the links for the River Restoration Centre below, remember FPP can be and is used for other habitat types other than rivers.

[http://www.therrc.co.uk/sites/default/files/general/Training/RRC_Courses_Workshops/2016/rrc - fixed point photography.pdf](http://www.therrc.co.uk/sites/default/files/general/Training/RRC_Courses_Workshops/2016/rrc_-_fixed_point_photography.pdf)
[http://www.therrc.co.uk/sites/default/files/files/Guidance_training/fixed point photography.pdf](http://www.therrc.co.uk/sites/default/files/files/Guidance_training/fixed_point_photography.pdf)



**Bedfordshire
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Aims to provide a comprehensive resource open to landowners, managers and animal keepers advising on all aspects of managing, restoring and using permanent grasslands.

The Wildlife Trust will be bringing back the Cut&Chew website in the New Year.

This website will be a simplified version of the last website whilst still offering the same key resource of acting as a local match making service between available land and livestock. It will provide information to help find the right people, services and products to manage land traditionally and for the benefit of wildlife, as well as providing guidance on grassland management and restoration techniques.

On the website you will be able to:

- Register land or livestock available for grazing
- Register any meadows available for hay production
- View information about pasture and meadow management, funding opportunities and more...

Please keep checking our main website at www.wildlifebcn.org for more information in the New Year. If you don't want to wait until the website is live and you have land or livestock you want to register with us now then please contact Lewis Dickinson. Contact details on the back page.



Hebridean Sheep

Habitat Focus: Freshwater Ponds

A UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitat, ponds are incredibly important habitats providing benefits for us and the environment. Ponds provide a wide range of unique benefits from flooding and catchment water management to a home to some of the UK's most protected species.



Ponds have recently been recognised as one of the most important habitat types for aquatic plant and invertebrate species diversity, collectively supporting more species over large water bodies such as rivers and lakes at a catchment level. This is because ponds have a large surface area of edge habitat compared to that of larger water bodies. This shallow undulating edge habitat provides the suitable conditions for marginal and emergent plant communities to grow. These plant communities provide a range of diverse and niche habitats that support a wide range of invertebrates, such as dragonflies, damselflies, and diving beetles, as well as vertebrates, like water shrews and water voles.

Ponds also provide benefits on a catchment scale for water management. Ponds can provide additional flood storage in the flood plain helping to mitigate flood risk. Ponds can also help with retention of sediment, carbon cycling, nutrients, and pollution. The latter two are broken down by the pond vegetation, preventing it from entering our already fragile river environments.

The most important kind of ponds is clean water ponds. These ponds are fed by groundwater, springs, or surface run off from untreated land environments such as wildflower meadows. These ponds are generally disconnected from the main river channel as lowland main rivers tend to be enriched and have a heavy sediment load that will alter the chemical balance of a freshwater pond. Ponds fed by clean runoff or groundwater support the greatest diversity of life due to the cleanliness of the water.

Other kinds of ponds that are fed by treated land runoff or by rivers and streams still also provide benefits. These kinds of ponds play an important part in floodwater management as well as nutrient cycling and breaking down pollutants. These ponds will also support life, if it is attached to the river the pond may be a suitable fish nursery, but not quite to the extent of a clean water pond.

The Freshwater Habitats Trust (FHT) recognises that there has been a 50% loss in ponds in the 20th Century alone, with 80% of the remaining ponds surviving in poor condition. Whilst these figures concern us there are some positive steps that can be taken.

Ponds are relatively easy and quick habitats to create in a landscape. It is almost as easy as digging a hole! Once you have created a pond you can either partially plant it to give it a head start or leave it to naturally colonise with plants on its own. Within a couple of years the pond should be supporting a variety of life.

There is some best practice guidance to maximise the benefits of a created pond, which looks at siting a pond, its water source, and creating interesting margins to benefit and encourage different vegetation to colonise.

For more information on how you could create a pond, have a look at the FHT pond creation toolkit for plenty of information and factsheets.

freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/million-ponds/pond-creation-toolkit



Where have they gone? Looking after our insects in the natural world

Many of you may have already seen the headlines over this year surrounding vast numbers of flying insect species decline on German nature reserves (over 75% decline of flying insects in 25 years) or heard the discussions on national and local radio about anecdotal decline in the number of insects splattered on car windshields in the summer. Whilst there may be an element of scepticism amongst some as to how much insect decline has occurred and the causes there is consensus on the importance of insects in the natural world, our insects are vital and there would be ecological collapse if they disappeared.



It's for this reason that we should try to do more to help protect and increase insect population numbers. As the national and supranational governments debate and discuss what policies can be taken to reverse this decline on an international scale it is down to us as protectors of valuable sites for local biodiversity (our County Wildlife Sites) to help the struggling insects. The 'State of Nature' report in 2016 shows us that definitive action and small projects can make a big difference.

There are a number of low cost ways in which we can help our invertebrate friends flourish and help their populations be more resilient to future threats such as climate change. One of the best ways to help is by providing more of the right kind of habitat. This could be creating or expanding on wildflower meadows, encouraging more wildflowers, or creating butterfly or bee banks to provide vital feeding and nesting habitat.

Planting of flowering trees and hedgerows can also provide another layer of structural habitat diversity that will encourage different insect species.



Marbled White
Butterfly

Another method of helping insects could be by reducing the amount of pesticide application on a CWS. As there is a growing body of evidence against the application of certain pesticides, some consideration could be given as to where and the amount of pesticides are applied on a site. Reducing the use of pesticides on a CWS, by managing issues in a more ecologically friendly manner, could have a positive impact on insects in and around a CWS.

A final way of helping insects could be by linking habitats over a landscape. Schemes such as the Wildlife Trust's Living Landscapes aim to create large areas of linked habitats that will benefit a wide range of species. On a local level links between different CWSs form part of the objectives for connecting habitats. For a CWS owner looking to help improve connectivity you could turn over a margin of land for conservation to help insects to move between yours and another nearby CWS. Or maybe you want to create a similar habitat to a nearby CWS, such as a pond, to benefit insects. Connecting habitats improve insect's chances of survival and help population growth.

Whilst the outlook may not look good, there are some easy actions that will have a big effect. Providing more, better and linked up habitat, as identified in the Wildlife Trusts Living Landscape objectives, is an excellent way of helping insect populations recover.

White-tailed Queen

Bumblebee



We all need to do our bit to help insects and as a CWS manager you form a key part of that by providing and managing good quality habitat to a great standard for biodiversity, so keep up the good work!

For more information about Living Landscapes go to:

www.wildlifebcn.org/what-we-do/living-landscape

For advice on what you can do to help insects contact Lewis Dickinson (contact details on the back page).

Contacts



Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire

Lewis Dickinson 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

Tel: 01234 364213

Email: lewis.dickinson@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 Website: 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 **Lewis Dickinson** at the above telephone number, email or address.