



Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire



wildlifebcn

Wild Places



A Newsletter for Owners and
Managers of Wildlife Sites



©Brian Eversham - Red-veined Darter Dragonfly

Welcome to the ninth 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. Thank you for your continued support of these valuable and vital spaces.

County Wildlife Sites (CWS) update

The incredibly cold start to spring followed shortly by the scorching summer certainly made for an interesting survey season. In total 20 sites were surveyed. The sites included woodlands, meadows and ponds, most retained due to the hard work of the landowners. Working closely with different organisations has meant that many sites have been restored or brought into improved management.

Inside this issue

CWS Update, Update to Managing Ash Woodlands and Churchyards for Swifts.....	2-3
Greensand Country Grants Scheme.....	4-5
Species Focus: Water Voles.....	6-7
Habitat Focus: Small Watercourses.....	8-9
Great Pignut in the North Chilterns Chalk.....	10-11
Contacts.....	12

Ash Dieback - Update to Managing Ash in Woodlands

The Forestry Commission released an operations note for managing Ash in woodlands in light of Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) in September 2018.

The document provides excellent practical advice on managing Ash in your woodlands.

Below are a couple of the key messages from the operations note:

- There is evidence to suggest that once trees are infected with Ash Dieback then they are susceptible to colonisation by secondary pathogens which can result the final cause of tree decline and death.
- Several studies have reported that a low proportion of trees (1 - 5% of the population) may possess a partial but heritable tolerance to *H. fraxineus*. Therefore, forestry practices can play a key role in conservation by retaining trees with exceptionally low damage levels .

The full document can be accessed via the gov.uk website and searching for "Operations Note 46".



Forestry Commission

Call to Action - Churchyards for Swifts

Swifts (*Apus apus*) are a wonderful bird species, lighting up our summer afternoons in the garden with their elegant yet zippy flight style coupled with their screeching calls. They fly thousands of miles from Africa to be with us from early May until the end of July. However their numbers are declining rapidly!

To combat this decline we are looking for churchyards that may be able to install Swift boxes under the eaves or in church towers to help provide extra nest sites.

If you think you may have a suitable site or would like to know more please contact us. Details on the back page.

Greensand Country Landscape Partnership Third Party Grants for Habitat-related Projects

The Greensand Country Landscape Partnership scheme is nearing the half-way stage. One of the aims of the scheme is to protect, enhance and reconnect habitats at all scales across the Greensand Country area.

The Third Party Grant Scheme exists to help land owners and managers 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 programme is also offering advice and training on land management.

The Landscape Partnership would be interested to hear from any land owners or managers who have an interest in helping improve the area for wildlife and engaging local communities with it. Applicants could be farmers and land owners/managers, community groups, churches and other faith communities, schools or others with a desire to enhance the area.

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

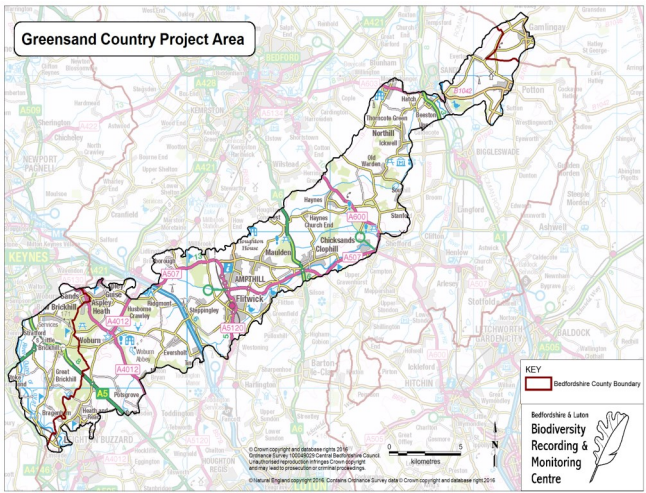
For more information or an informal chat about a project idea contact

Greensand Country Landscape Partnership Team:

01234 838774 / team@greensandcountry.com

To apply for funding:

- 1) Email the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership Team: team@greensandcountry.com 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.



Species Focus - Where are our Water Voles?

Many may fondly remember summer in their youth strolling along the local river or brook and hearing the distinctive plopping sound of one of our most beloved mammals, the Water Vole.

The picture is very different today with a population crash of almost 90% between 1989 and 1998 alone. This has not improved in recent years with 30% decline in the areas where they live between 2006 and 2015.



The local story

In Bedfordshire Water Voles (*Arvicola amphibius*) are only found in a few places and continue to be threatened by habitat loss and predation by American Mink (*Neovison vison*).

Experienced surveyors felt that without immediate action water voles would be lost from Bedfordshire. In response the Mink Trapping Project started in 2005. The aim was to reduce mink numbers around the existing populations of water voles, after a slow start the project gained much success between 2008 and 2013.

Where are we now?

After a positive start and evidence in the number of growing water vole populations, the last few years of the Moving Mink Rafts Project has not had as much success. After funding finished and Mink trapping petered out, numbers of Water Voles have declined.

However all is not lost, Bedfordshire still retains a small number of populations and the Mink trapping project has been revived under the Moving Mink Rafts Project with a more sustainable future. Funding from the Environment Agency contributed towards the project, purchasing 20 mink rafts, traps and tracking cartridges; as well as five remote trap sensors (similar to MinkPolice) and four trail cameras.

The project partners (Wildlife Trust BCN, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and Environment Agency) aim to engage with more landowners/managers who are happy to, or may already, trap Mink.

What we would like to do

Our key focus for the next 5 years is to:

- Expand Mink trapping over Bedfordshire sustainably to help reduce the impact this non-native invasive species has on the remaining Water Vole populations,
- Widen our monitoring network to locate and monitor as many remaining populations as possible,
- Map a habitat network around these populations to ensure that they have the capacity to breed and disperse effectively.

During this period we will also be taking opportunities to reconnect suitable habitat to help boost local populations of Water Voles' chance of survival and help their recovery.

Help their recovery!

Want to be a part of the project or do your bit (however big or small!) to help our Water Voles recover? Already trap Mink on your land? Want to trap Mink? Own a small brook/river that could be improved? Know of any local Water Vole populations or want to survey your area for them? We would like to know.

Get in touch with our Water for Wildlife Officer Lewis Dickinson at:
lewis.dickinson@wildlifebcn.org

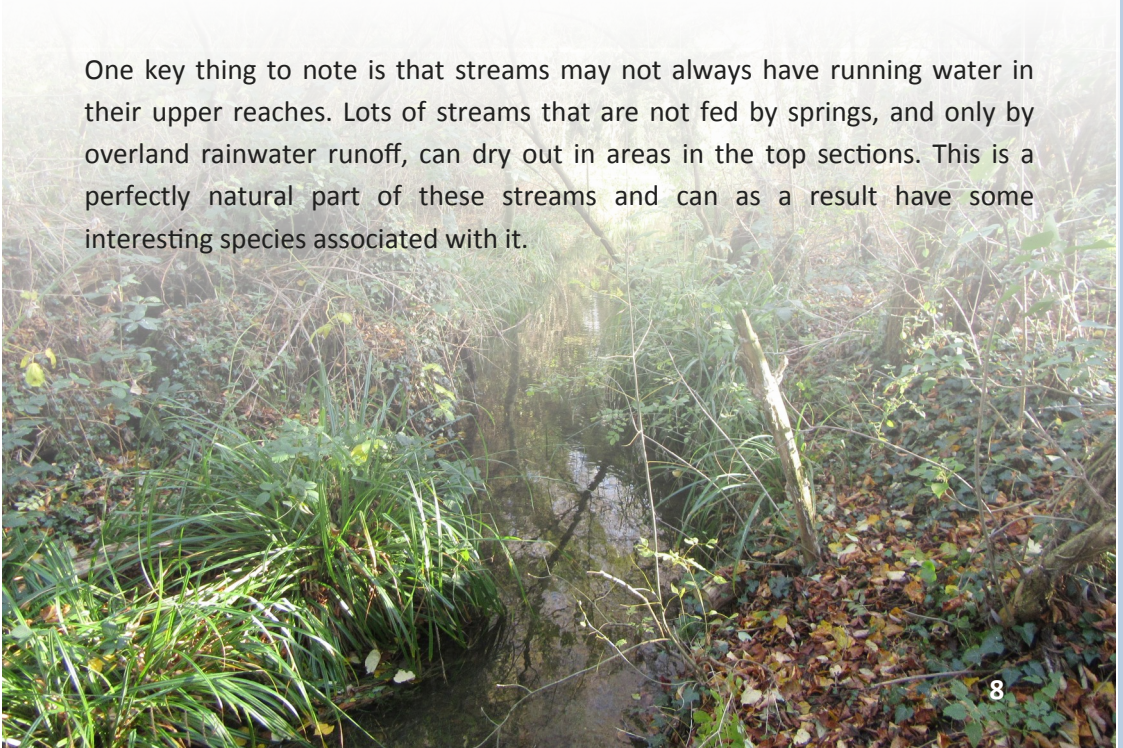
Habitat Focus: Small Watercourses

Small watercourses like streams, if looked after, have huge benefits for biodiversity. The headwaters provide fresh, clean water that flows through a myriad of habitat types from shaded woodland to species rich grassland, shallow in depth over gravels into deep pools, and features other niches such as woody debris, all ultimately feeding into a main river. It's this diversity of habitat types that yields the rich biodiversity of our streams and they are also an important habitat for our Water Vole friends from the last article!

How are they defined?

So what do we mean when we say a small watercourse. Well it can have a range of names depending on where in the country you are from, such as: brook, stream, rivulet, rill and more. But the key features (according to the Freshwater Habitats Trust) are that it is less than 8.25m wide, usually has a sinuous form, and shows a relationship with the surrounding natural landscape contours such as running down valleys.

One key thing to note is that streams may not always have running water in their upper reaches. Lots of streams that are not fed by springs, and only by overland rainwater runoff, can dry out in areas in the top sections. This is a perfectly natural part of these streams and can as a result have some interesting species associated with it.



What are the issues?

As the biological importance of these ecosystems are dependant on fresh clean water, one of the biggest threats to their biodiversity and condition is pollution. This doesn't just include pollution from Nitrates and Phosphates but also sediments. We understand the impacts that excessive Nitrates and Phosphates have on these fragile ecosystems, eutrophication and excessive aquatic weed growth being chief among these. However until recently the impact of sediments had not been particularly appreciated, as sediment load and movement do form a part of the natural process of watercourses. We now know that excess sediment input can result in pressures on the water environment such as loss of clean gravel habitat, which is essential for fish spawning and certain invertebrate species.

What can we do?

The Upper and Bedford Ouse Catchment Partnership are looking at opportunities to improve the quality and biodiversity of all waterbodies within the catchment. If you are a farmer with a stream that runs alongside/through your land the Catchment Partnership have an Agricultural Sub-group that is working with local farmers. Information about the Upper and Bedford Ouse Catchment Partnership can be found at: ubocp.org.uk.

At a more local level if you think your stream could be improved by adding some woody debris or trying to address sediment or other pollutant issues or perhaps you want some advice on what could be done? The Wildlife Trust has a Water for Wildlife Officer who is looking to work with landowners to improve watercourses where possible.

If you are interested in a project for your stream or just want someone to take a look to see what improvements can be made, then you can contact the Water for Wildlife Officer at: lewis.dickinson@wildlifebcn.org

Great Pignut (*Bunium bulbocastanum*) in the North Chilterns

What is it?

Great Pignut (also known as Black-caraway) is a perennial plant that produces delicate and lacy clusters of white flowers in an umbellifer (small clusters of flowers on separate stalks that converge on a single point at the end of the stem) in the summer and produces a tuber in the autumn.

This beautiful dainty plant can be distinguished from other umbellifers, such as wild carrot, by looking at the fine delicate leaves and hairless stem.



©Laura Downton - Great Pignut

Where can it be found?

In the UK it is only found in Beds, Herts, Bucks and Cambs. Here in Bedfordshire Great Pignut has a stronghold in the North Chilterns Chalk, with some of the largest populations being found at Dallow Downs SSSI and Galley and Warden Hills SSSI.

Great Pignut prefers the dryer and free draining chalk soils for its habitat, particularly where land was formerly cultivated but also disturbed areas on chalk downs, field edges, hedgerows, road verges and quarries.

The best time to see Great Pignut flowering is between mid-June and early-July dependant on the seasonal weather conditions.

Why does it need conserving?

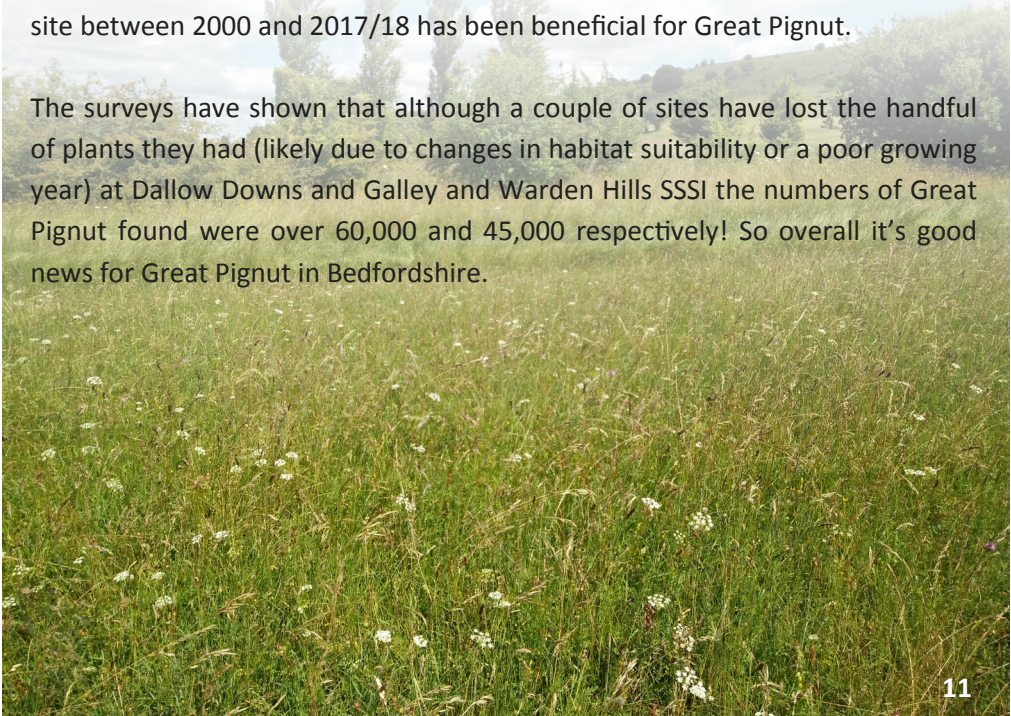
Although it was said earlier that it is a plant of ‘Least Concern’ on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) list, it is still rare across the UK being found only along a band spanning a small part of 4 counties in Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, and Bedfordshire. The main pressures come from leisure activities, habitat loss, and development.

Another key reason for preserving Great Pignut here, alongside its local rarity, is to preserve the local population genetics of the UK plants. Preserving the wider gene pools of the different populations helps the species develop long term resilience against impacts such as climate change.

What is being done so far?

Surveys have been undertaken by the Wildlife Trust in 2017 and 2018, at the request of Luton Borough Council, to look at the changes in population for Great Pignut in Bedfordshire, as the last surveys were done in 2000. Looking at how the population has changed can give us an idea if the management of the site between 2000 and 2017/18 has been beneficial for Great Pignut.

The surveys have shown that although a couple of sites have lost the handful of plants they had (likely due to changes in habitat suitability or a poor growing year) at Dallow Downs and Galley and Warden Hills SSSI the numbers of Great Pignut found were over 60,000 and 45,000 respectively! So overall it's good news for Great Pignut in Bedfordshire.



Contacts



**Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire**

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: bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org

Address; To: Wildlife Sites 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 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 The Wildlife Sites Officer on the above telephone number, email or address.