



Wildlife Trust for
Beds, Cambs
& Northants



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Wild Places

A Newsletter for Owners and
Managers of Wildlife Sites

www.wildlifebcn.org

2022

Welcome to the eleventh 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 407 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.

What We’ve Been Up To

During the last two years, we have visited and provided advice to over 20 wildlife sites, including CWS’s, churchyards, public and private land. This has included surveying and mapping an estate to [UK Habitat classification](#) level.

We have recently been in conversation with the Newt Conservation Partnership regarding the creation of new ponds as habitat for newts. If you have an area of land that you feel would be suitable for a new pond to be created, or a degraded pond in need of restoration, don’t hesitate to contact them directly at info@newtpartnership.org.uk for more information.

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Legislation Progress

The Environment Act

The Environment Act received Royal Assent and passed into law on the 9th November 2021. This sets out statutory targets for the recovery of air quality, biodiversity, water and waste, with a target to reverse the decline in species abundance by the end of 2030. The specific targets were due to be released on the 31st October 2022. However, the government has missed this deadline, and so we still await more news on exactly what these targets will be.

The Office for Environmental Protection has been set up with the aim of protecting the environment by holding the government and other public bodies to account. [The Wildlife Trusts have called on them to investigate the government for missing this deadline.](#)

The Environmental Land Management Scheme

The Environmental Land Management Scheme (Elms) proposes to pay farmers and land managers to enhance the natural environment alongside food production. However, under the Truss government, Elms was placed under review, with the likelihood of area based payments being brought back, providing more uncertainty for land managers and no incentives for promoting biodiversity. The new government under Sunak seems to be leaning more towards the original thinking, but there has not been definite confirmation of this either way. Updates on the status of Elms can be found on the [Defra farming blog](#).



©Laura Taylor—Arable field margin

Species Focus - Juniper

Juniper is an evergreen shrub with needle-like leaves. The berries of which are traditionally used to flavour gin.

Juniper populations have been declining for a long time across the nation with many counties in southern England having lost more than 60% of their juniper population.

The berries are green at first, but ripen after 18 months to a dark, blue-purple colour. Due to the long ripening period, berries occur on juniper throughout the year - it's often possible to see them at different stages of development on the same plant. There is a long association of juniper with people, with the best known use being the flavouring of gin with the berries.

They are slow-growing, typically growing about 3-5cm per year and live on average for about 100 - 120 years, however the oldest recorded juniper in the UK was a staggering 255 years old!



©Lizzy Dobbie— Juniper sapling planted in 2020 with tree guards

Survival of juniper at Kensworth Quarry

The majority of this site features a working quarry and is therefore not accessible to the public, it is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to its interesting geological features. It has quality chalk grassland that has been threatened with scrub encroachment, and is also host to the only known population of wild juniper trees in Bedfordshire.

The junipers at Kensworth Quarry are found just south of the quarry dispersed along a small area of chalk cliffs. All of the mature junipers were being engulfed by invading scrub which was limiting their access to light, water and nutrients.

In 2017 the Wildlife Trust planted 6 junipers in a carefully chosen sunlit spot of chalk grassland. This species is dioecious, which means individual plants are either male or female, so as you can imagine, a lot of attention went into ensuring that a mix of the sexes were planted.

At the end of 2020 a further 7 juniper saplings were planted to reinforce our new transplanted population, and at last time of checking 6 of these had survived.

North Chilterns Conservation Volunteers

The North Chilterns Conservation Volunteers are part of the Chiltern Society's roving groups of volunteers. Although their range is limited to the Chilterns in the south of Bedfordshire, they can take on a variety of tasks. They played a vital role in clearing the scrub encroaching on the recently planted juniper saplings.

To discuss opportunities please contact:
Andy & Kath Davis; T: 07837 161532; E:
northchilternCV@gmail.com



© jonpfei (CC-BY-NC) - Juniper

Rare Species Guardians

This year a new project has been gathering pace in Bedfordshire, the Rare Species Guardians. The project aims to monitor and protect the rarest fauna and flora across the whole of Bedfordshire, and is in collaboration with the Bedfordshire Natural History Society's Flora Group, The Greensand Trust and the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre (BRMC).

For each species and site they're located at, a guardian is assigned. They check on their species throughout the year if they're threatened, or just annually if the population is stronger. They help to identify what can be done to boost each species or discover what is causing their decline. We currently have over 10 volunteers monitoring around 20 species such as the Green-winged Orchid, the Bog Pimpernel and the Marsh Violet, and would always welcome more volunteers.

Our focus started small, with a handful of plants picked from a long list. We are now building momentum, with organisations from each area picking their own species. At the moment the focus is on plants, but we hope to expand this to include fauna as well as flora.

On top of the work our Guardians will be carrying out, we'll also be intensely monitoring particularly threatened species, with a group of volunteers gathering detailed information on the population (seedlings, flowering rates etc.) as well as trialling interventions to protect the population.



© Sarah Lambert —Pasqueflower

Pasqueflowers

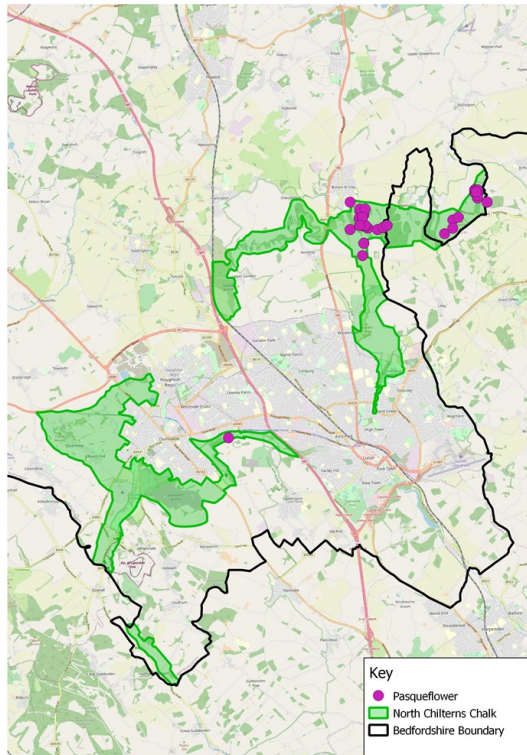
We're starting at home with this project, taking a close look at the Pasqueflowers on one of our biggest reserves, Pegsdon Hills, where our sheep have taken a distinct liking to the purple flowers. Not a great way of conserving the population to say the least!

We have put metal tags next to every known plant so that they can be found with a metal detector, and have put chicken wire cages around them to stop them being grazed off. This coming year we are planning on putting a small electric fence around the area to see if any more come up.

Fingers crossed that we will start to see more individuals in the future!

If you're interested in becoming a Guardian or would like to invite a Guardian to monitor a Rare Species on your land, please contact the Wider Countryside team at T: 01234 364213; E: bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org

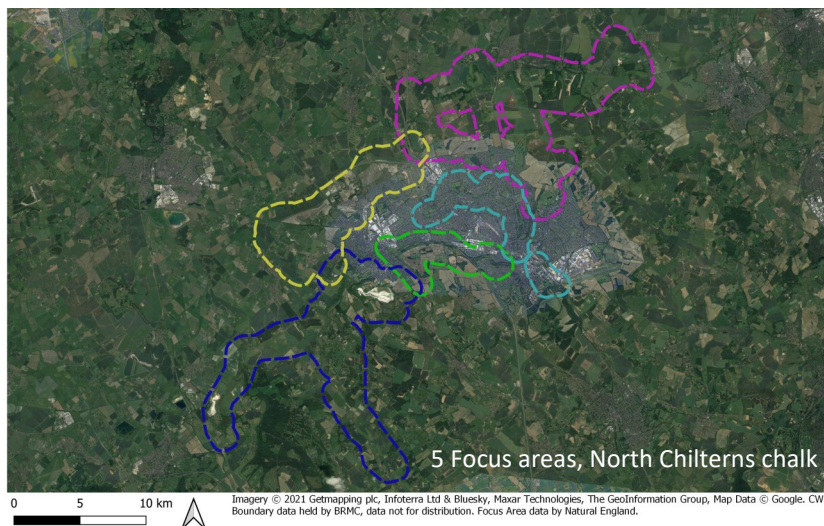
If you would like to invite the Flora Group to undertake a survey at any particularly interesting areas of your land please contact: John Wakely; vetjw@me.com



Known distribution of pasqueflowers in the North Chilterns Chalk, 2019

Nature Recovery Network—North Chilterns

Since 2020, the Wildlife Trust BCN has been involved with an exciting project, in partnership with Natural England and Chilterns Conservation Board, to map out a 'Nature Recovery Network' (NRN). This project started by testing the approach on a small area in the North Chilterns, and subsequently expanded to cover all 5 Focus Areas in the map below.



What is a Nature Recovery Network and why is this needed?

An NRN aims to reconnect habitats and help nature thrive across a landscape by looking at the most valuable sites and habitats for wildlife alongside their priorities for linking up and restoring nature. Nature needs our help more than ever, especially in light of the multiple pressures of habitat loss and climate change. By being proactive and initially mapping opportunities and highlighting priorities for the future we can help nature and wildlife recover and be more resilient to climate change and other pressures. Building a strong NRN is one of the major commitments in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

What is this project about?

The overarching aim is to identify priority locations, within the North Chilterns for enhancement and creation of natural habitats as part of a local NRN. In supporting the creation of an NRN you will be playing a key role in helping wildlife move through the landscape, building resilience to climate change, and potentially preventing local species extinction.

What opportunities are available for funding?

The projects final aim is to identify priority areas for funding to deliver benefits for nature. This funding will come from various pots, at a national scale through “Public Money for Public Goods” in the Agriculture Act. At a local level, through the National Lottery Heritage Fund project, [Chalkscapes](#). Also the forthcoming Biodiversity offsetting/credits system, which is part of the Biodiversity Net Gain principle for developments. These opportunities, when they are ready, will provide funding to help deliver habitat creation and management to help nature thrive.

I don't live in the North Chilterns but would like to help an NRN

Don't worry! Lots of organisations, including ours and Natural England, are keen to get as much of the country mapped as possible. Keep your eyes peeled as it will only be a matter of time before an NRN comes to your area! In the meantime, you can prepare for this by identifying opportunities for nature recovery on your land and getting in touch so we can add you to an interest register!

Where can I find out more?

Nature Recovery Networks: The Royal Society for Wildlife Trusts ([Space for nature | The Wildlife Trusts](#)) provide some information on what we're doing on NRNs and [Natural England](#) gave an update in July as to the progress that has been made nationally.

Biodiversity Offsetting: A scheme still in pilot but reflecting the Biodiversity Net Gain principle which is in the Environment Act stating, essentially, that developers must achieve biodiversity improvement on a site by at least 10%, and if they can't do it on site they need to pay for habitat improvements elsewhere for a minimum of 30 years. We expect the mandatory requirements to come into effect in winter 2023. Any landowners interested in finding out more, please contact the Wider Countryside team (contact details on back page).



© Nik Shelton — Pegsdon Hills

Habitat Focus - Neutral Grassland

What are Neutral Grasslands?

Neutral Grasslands (also known as lowland meadows or pastures) are species-rich grasslands with a near neutral pH. These grasslands are characterised by low nutrient inputs and are traditionally managed by low intensity grazing or a summer hay cut followed by aftermath grazing.

Why are they important?

Unimproved meadows and pastures are typically species-rich, and are associated with some scarce and declining plants such as greater burnet, cowslip, dyer's greenweed, meadow saxifrage, greenwinged orchid and adder's tongue fern. They can also support many species of fungi, such as the waxcaps which can only be found in old, unimproved meadows. Typical invertebrates include the marbled white butterfly and meadow ant. In addition they provide feeding and nesting sites for a number of bird species including skylark, grey partridge, meadow pipit and especially as feeding areas for barn owls.

How should you manage Neutral Grassland for wildlife?

- Continue the long standing practices. If a meadow has been subject to a long-term hay cutting regime, it is important to continue this, as any species remaining will be tolerant of such pressures, and the floral diversity should be conserved.
- If grazing is an option, consider low intensity grazing from early summer through to end of October. Remove stock from the land before poaching occurs, and allow it to rest over the winter. Alternatively, another option is a combination of a hay cut in mid to late summer followed by aftermath grazing until end of October before the ground is poached.
- Sites which are unsuitable for grazing due to their size or location may be managed by taking a hay cut from the meadow. The removal of the hay will prevent the enrichment of the soil and will lead to an increase in the biodiversity of the field.
- Grasslands should be protected from herbicides, pesticides and fungicides. Nutrient inputs should also be avoided, as this reduces the floral diversity.
- Scrub should be prevented from invading areas of open pasture, but some patches of scattered scrub could be allowed as it supports its own invertebrate fauna.
- Some meadows will be eligible for conservation support through agri- environmental schemes. This could include grants for haymaking, reducing livestock numbers, and putting in fences to allow grazing to take place.

What threats are Neutral Grasslands facing?

They are dependent on farming and are affected by changes in farming methods and policies, including both agricultural intensification and neglect. Key threats include:

- Drainage
- Ploughing
- Fertiliser application
- Re-seeding
- Fragmentation
- The practice of cropping silage
- Overgrazing and under-grazing

Grassland Creation

If you would like to discuss enhancing your grassland or creating a species rich grassland from scratch, please contact the Wider Countryside Team (contact details on the back page).

National Meadows Day takes place on the first Saturday of July each year and gives you a chance to see meadows at the height of their flowering period and raise awareness for this declining habitat.

If you are interested in connecting with meadow owners, graziers and those looking for hay, or more detailed and tailored advice, please contact the Wider Countryside team:

T: 01234 364213 E: bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org



© Laura Taylor—Neutral grassland meadow, Thurleigh

Contacts



**Wildlife Trust for
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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: [Bedfordshire | Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs & Northants \(wildlifebcn.org\)](http://www.wildlifebcn.org)

Tel: 01234 364213

Email: 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 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 at the above telephone number, email or address.

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