



Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire



**People close to nature,
in a land rich in wildlife**

The Wildlife Trust BCN Annual Review 2017/2018

Our Impact 2017-2018

It has been an exciting year. The summer of 2017 saw the opening of this Wildlife Trust's first visitor centre, at the Rushden Lakes retail and leisure complex. This purpose-built centre was provided by the developers, and provides the ideal place for the Trust to meet new people, in a beautiful setting overlooking the first of several lakes.

The Trust has also taken on the management of the land adjoining Rushden Lakes, a 90 ha (222 acre) addition to our land holding; most important is that this links together our four existing reserves in the heart of the Nene Valley, creating an impressive 270 ha (667 acre) site, our largest after the Great Fen. The resulting Nene Wetlands reserve is an excellent example of our strategy of creating larger reserves and joining them up to make Living Landscapes, which provide space for more species to thrive and will help wildlife to cope with threats like climate change.

This, as well as projects such as Trumpington Meadows and Lilbourne Meadows, shows how the Trust's work with developers, can be good for wildlife and good for local people. Not all development is so positive, and when necessary we campaign to prevent development that is seriously damaging to wildlife. This year, we objected to a proposed new settlement next to Castor Hanglands National nature reserve west of Peterborough, which would have been devastating to this internationally important site. Thankfully the city council removed the proposal from their plans.

2017 also saw the successful completion of eight years of funding for our work to restore 933 ha (2305 acres) of the Great Fen to wet grassland. Our engineering of the water management will enable the area gradually to revert to a wide range of fen habitats and contribute to water management for agriculture. Wildlife is already responding.

We are particularly grateful for the continued support we have received from our members. Our members are essential to our work and it is thanks to them that we can achieve a better outcome for wildlife.

If you have supported us this year, whether as staff, a member, a corporate partner, by donating to an appeal, by volunteering or in any other way, thank you. We are a charitable organisation and we depend on your help.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Graham Fry'.

Sir Graham Fry
Chairman of
the Council

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Our Five Year Plan: Better for wildlife by 2020

Great white egrets are now a regular sight at our Pitsford Water nature reserve

Delivery

We will create Living Landscapes at the heart of the local community, enhancing our nature reserves and basing our management on sound research and monitoring

Reaching out

We will engage with people to inspire them about the natural world and encourage them to take action for wildlife

People and culture

We will become the conservation organisation that people want to support and work for, and enable staff and volunteers to excel in their roles

Partners

We will build strong and effective partnerships that benefit wildlife, the Trust and others

Finance

We will ensure the Trust is a financially viable and sustainable organisation by growing and diversifying our income to deliver our goals now and in the future



Thanks to you: some of this year's highlights



© Stefan Johansson

Lesser spotted woodpeckers were present at Lings nature reserve throughout the breeding season.



© Amy Lewis

Avocets returned to the lagoons at Grafham Water nature reserve.



© Josh Hellon

Our ground-breaking drone monitoring technique identified 14 heron nests at Pitsford Water nature reserve.



© Amy Lewis

A grey seal caused great surprise by appearing on a backwater at Godmanchester nature reserve.



© Gwen Hitchcock

Our survey found 86,000 rare great pignut plants on a Local Wildlife Site in Luton.



© Wildlife Trust BCN

The juniper population at Kensworth Quarry nature reserve, Beds, was boosted from 17 to 23.



© David Tipling/2020vision

A rare fruit tree tooth-fungus was found on the site of an old orchard in Cambridge.



© Tom Marshall

The Fens remain a stronghold for water vole, despite reports this year of their decline elsewhere in Britain.



© Tony Vrials

The scarce dwarf mouse-ear flowered again in the Nene Wetlands this year after work to rescue it from a near miss.

Not forgetting...

- We opened our first visitor centre and around 70,000 people visited us.
- We managed 4,046 hectares (10,000 acres or 100 km²) of nature reserve for all to enjoy.
- 200,000+ people visited our website to learn more about wildlife.
- Over 1,000 volunteers and 109 staff helped us get closer to achieving our vision for wildlife.
- 33,749 members supported us to do more for local wildlife.



**We are supported by
around 9 volunteers to
every 1 member of staff**



**Nearly £5 million spent on wildlife in
Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire**

Our Living Landscapes - We are thinking big

Wildlife can't truly thrive in confined spaces. As well as careful management of our nature reserves, we are creating wildlife corridors around farm land, field margins, roads, rivers and built-up areas in order to 'join up' landscapes with a high number of our reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites. These Living Landscapes allow wildlife to move from site to site.

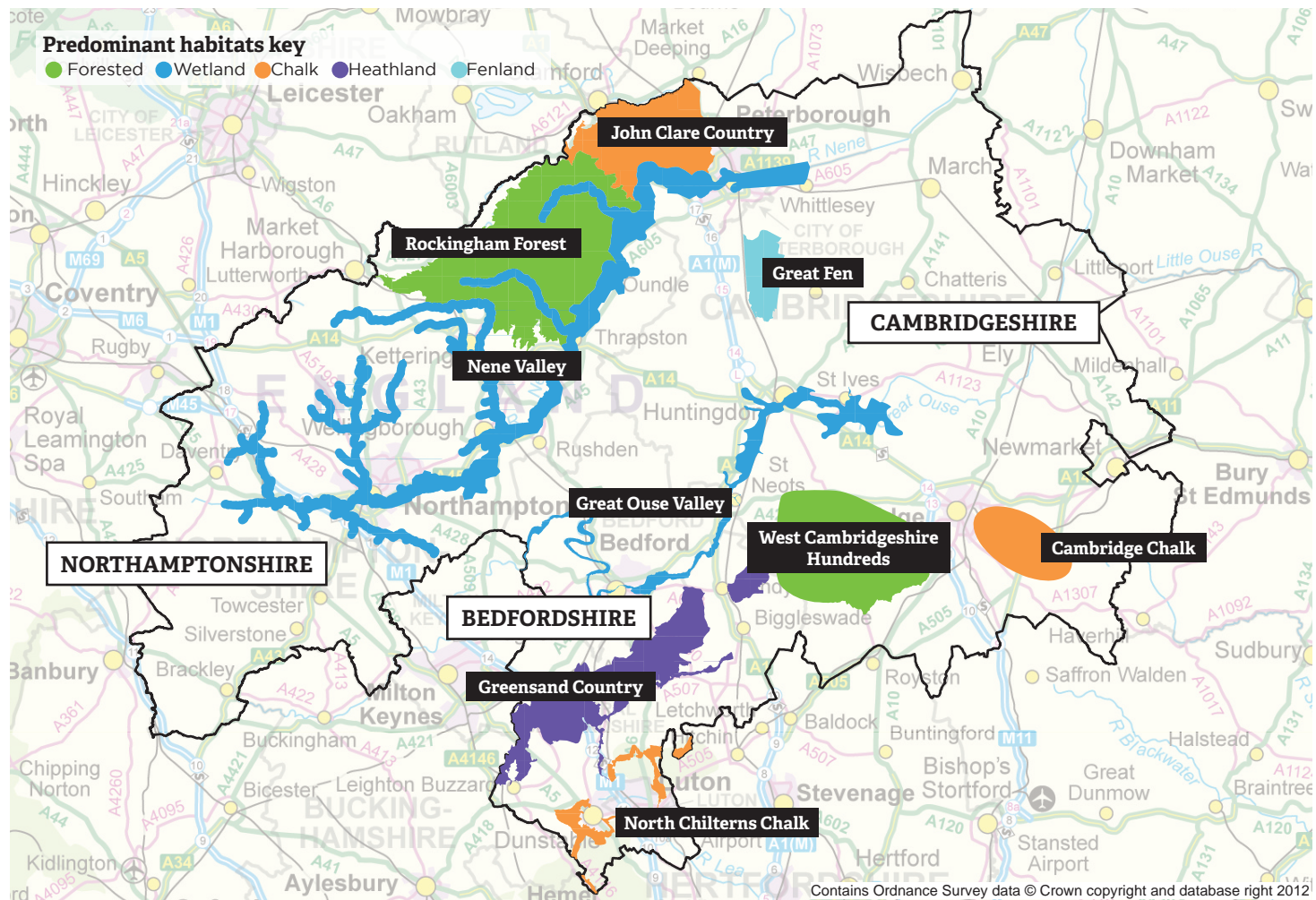
Nene Valley

- **We opened our first visitor centre at Rushden Lakes** retail complex through a ground-breaking partnership with the developers. This also gave us 90ha (222 acres) of additional land to extend our Nene Wetlands nature reserve.
- Our work has ensured that while the numbers of people visiting the area has increased, the breeding bird species assemblage has remained constant.
- **There were increases in a number of species. Sightings included:** birds such as wigeon, tufted duck, mute swan, gadwall, cormorant, bittern, woodcock, smew, grey wagtail, red kite, lesser spotted woodpecker and 13 grey heron nests; breeding grass snakes; bats including common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, noctule and Daubenton's; otters; 20 species of butterfly; 134 species of moth; and the nationally scarce dwarf mouse-ear.
- **Nenescape:** We are one of 11 partners in this HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme and are leading the Farming for the Future project.

Great Fen

- This year we **undertook extensive research and analysis for our Great Fen Evaluation Report** following the successful conclusion of the 8 year project, supported by a ground-breaking £9.1 million grant from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the largest ever given for nature conservation in England.
- Habitat restoration continues to progress rapidly and successes are beginning to be evident - this winter for the first time, water levels around Kester's Docking and Rymes Reedbed were **high enough to be attractive for wintering wildfowl and waders.**
- There have been 75 species of bird breeding in the restored areas, large numbers of wintering birds of prey, **cranes visiting in both winter and summer**, and a much richer flora in the grasslands, with species richness in individual fields having risen to 70 species per field in the wetter areas. These areas have also been colonised by rare fenland invertebrates.





Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012

North Chilterns Chalk

- We have **boosted the juniper population** at Kensworth Quarry nature reserve from 17 to 23 – this is the only site for this species in the county.
- Volunteers at Totternhoe continued the monitoring of **the man, musk and frog orchids** as well as great pignut.
- Grazing continues to be successful at Totternhoe, and well supported by volunteers and the general public.
- **Pegsdon Hills have been grazed this year**, supported by our grazier and our sheepdog Lass.
- Our Blow's Downs Doggy Day was a great success. Local dog owners found out about the wildlife they may encounter on their walks and had some scent training and a dog-friendly guided walk.



Great Ouse Valley

- Thirty-five volunteers signed up to become **River Wardens along stretches of the River Ouse** and its tributaries. Following comprehensive training, they have already provided **useful information on invasive non-native species** and some early water quality testing for nitrate and phosphate levels at the rivers they monitor. The goal of the scheme is to use the information to improve the river's ecology.
- In spring, the Trust held nine Singing with Nightingales events at our Grafham Water nature reserve. Nature lover and folk singer Sam Lee entertained audiences each night around a campfire. The audiences also learnt about the birds and the Trust's **work to create perfect nightingale breeding habitat at Grafham Water**.



Greensand Country

(Greensand Ridge and Flit Vale)

- **We are a partner in the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership (GCLP)**, which was established from a £1.66 million grant from HLF to protect and raise awareness of the heritage of the area. This area contains all of Bedfordshire's remaining lowland heathland, more than half of its woodland, and more surviving historic parkland than any other area in the county.
- Over four years, the GCLP aims to **restore and expand key habitats** for wildlife whilst engaging the local community.
- This year a new boardwalk was installed at Flitwick Moor as well as improved signage and interpretation boards.



Cambridgeshire Chalk

- Drone imagery taken by the monitoring team showed that areas of bare chalk at Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits have reduced from 58% to 24% since 2010, **demonstrating that successful revegetation has taken place since the Trust took over** management. Continued monitoring is essential to ensure the delicate early colonising species that earn this site its SSSI status are regularly given new areas of bare chalk to thrive on.

West Cambridgeshire Hundreds

- **THANKS TO YOU:** The year saw one of the most successful member appeals, funding the management of our woodland reserves.
- Winter woodland works included coppicing and thinning works at Hayley, Gamlingay, Waresley & Gransden, Wistow, and Hardwick Woods.
- **We gained the freehold of Gamlingay Meadow**, and the adjacent block of woodland, making meadow management more sustainable.

John Clare Country and Rockingham Forest

- Within both of these Living Landscapes, **scrub clearance work** has been undertaken through the Biffa Award funded Scrub Off project, to open up areas of calcareous grassland.
- At Dogsthorpe Star Pit, the pump house has been replaced. This will ensure **more efficient pumping, helping to maintain the SSSI in favourable condition.**



Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits nature reserve

Our three counties

There are many other places across our counties that are not within our Living Landscape schemes, but are still highly important for wildlife, including around 50 more nature reserves that we manage and a large number of Local Wildlife Sites.

We know we need to keep sight on anything that might affect wildlife anywhere across our three counties.

Development is often a culprit and we object to development plans that will have a negative impact.

However, we recognise that there is enormous potential for nature if we work together with developers, advising on plans and managing mitigation land to ensure a net gain for wildlife.



**Developer partnerships:
By working with the
developers Prologis,
we secured Lilbourne
Meadows, a 193 acre
nature reserve, ensuring
a net gain for wildlife**

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)

Local (or County) Wildlife Sites have some protection through local planning policies but are not protected by law, and so our work conserving these sites is crucial.

Soham in Cambs has a unique pattern of unenclosed commons running through the town, which have been designated as Local Wildlife Sites.

Unfortunately, the proposed growth of the town by 50% over the next 25 years would see housing fill in the land between and around parts of these commons and bring many new residents within walking distance of the sites.

Together with partners, we are commissioning a study to identify mitigation measures and biodiversity enhancements that can be paid for by the new developments.

Our work supporting Local Wildlife Sites this year also included preparing management plans for 11 Peterborough City Council sites, including three LWS.

We also undertook a survey on one LWS in Luton which found 86,000 nationally rare great pignut plants. It is now in the pipeline for SSSI designation.



Soham meadows

© Graham Barber



Rare great pignut

© Gwen Hitchcock

We advised on 83 LWS

Planning

The latest version of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan was published in March 2018. We have been liaising with the local councils and groups opposed to development at RAF Wyton, which could trigger damaging infrastructure development, such as a new road across the Ouse Valley at Godmanchester.

We objected to numerous housing allocations and policies in the Peterborough Local Plan. In particular we objected to the allocation of 2,500 homes close to Castor Hanglands National nature reserve and the allocation was removed in the later version.

Work is beginning on HS2 and we are engaged with the contractors. There will be further work for the Trust in the current year.

The Trust objected to the proposals which the Highways Agency published on the widening of the A47 from the A1 to the Norfolk coast as it would have direct negative impacts on a SSSI and one or more County Wildlife Sites.

We are monitoring proposals for the various busways being proposed including Cambourne to Cambridge and the Western Orbital Routes, which both have the potential to damage important wildlife sites on the edge of Cambridge.

Monitoring and Research

An evidence-led approach, underpinned by sound research and monitoring.

We published a range of our monitoring and research reports on our website in order to help improve conservation management across the country.

Reports on dormouse and bat monitoring, analyses of aerial images at individual reserves, and of the hydrology of some of our wetlands, have informed our habitat management.

We have used current survey results (bats, dormice, birds, deer, invertebrates) to develop an approach for woodland condition monitoring which we will trial next year.

Trail-blazing techniques - Herons: We successfully trialled use of a drone to survey the heronry at Pitsford Water nature reserve. The drone footage allowed us to identify a total of 14 nests, whilst only 10 were recorded from below.

Orchids: This year there were 10,196 green-winged orchids at Wildlife Trust Chettisham Meadow, 1,341 more than last year.

Grasses: 2017 was the second year of the Rapid Grassland Assessment programme. We have surveyed around 53 of the 160 areas so far.

Bats: New methods, sites and recording detectors used for bat surveys worked well this year. At Begwary Brook a Nathusius's pipistrelle was recorded - a scarce migrant bat, breeding in Britain, but generally wintering in mainland Europe.

We continued to support the Local Record Centres (LRCs):

Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Records Centre (BMRC)

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Environmental Records Centre (CPERC)

Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre (NBRC)





Sharing our evidence: The journal, Conservation Evidence, published our findings following five years of hard work trialling the best way to restore heather

Reaching out

The Trust engages with local communities in a variety of ways to grow support for nature conservation and inspire people to take action for local wildlife.

- An estimated 450,000 people visited our reserves.
- 10,700 people attended 600 wildlife events we ran across Beds, Cambs and Northants.
- Our activity centre based in the Nene Wetlands visitor centre has already delivered an extensive programme of events.
- 323 people were trained through our nationally acclaimed Wildlife Training Workshops.
- We have delivered innovative and quality nature themed programmes to over 1,900 school children, helping them reconnect with nature.
- 1,734 people took part in our 30 Days Wild campaign and pledged to do more for wildlife.
- We were supported by 12 Local Groups, who helped raise awareness of our work.



Crafting fun at Nene Wetlands

Membership

This year we are proud to have been supported by 33,723 members.

After 10 years without raising our members subscription rates, we took the difficult decision to make a small increase to our rates. We are thankful that so many of our members continued to support us and local wildlife through this change.

Our strength comes from our supporters, and their views and engagement are key in guiding our activity.

Members receive three editions of the award winning Trust magazine, **Local Wildlife**, and those paying by direct debit receive a free copy of our nature reserves guide, **Where to see Wildlife**. This year it was substantially updated and republished with a strong focus on improving public engagement with our reserves, and therefore with wildlife as a whole. This can also be bought by contacting the head office.



This photograph of a short-eared owl was one of the winners in our new annual photography competition and featured in our 2018 calendar



Partners

Enduring and improving relationships have been, and will continue to be, important factors in the Trust's success. Without the support and co-operation of a huge number of people, we would have achieved little during the year. The support of members, corporate members, sponsors, charitable trusts, government organisations at all levels and our professional advisers has been vital, as has the remarkably dedicated work of our volunteers and staff.

Our Great Fen partners:

Environment Agency, Huntingdonshire District Council, Natural England

Our corporate members (as of March 2018):

Corporate Partners (£5k+): Arm, The Biodiversity Consultancy, House of Fraser, Prologis UK Ltd

Corporate Investors (£1k+): Anglian Water Services Ltd, Arqiva Ltd, Gardenworks Tree Surgery, Hewitsons, Orton Hall Hotel and Spa, Scott Bader, Scudamore's Punting Company, UK Power Networks, Unilever Research Colworth

Corporate Supporters (£500):

Alpro Soya, Athene Communications, British Racing Drivers' Club, Building Services Design, Cambridge Belfry Hotel, Cambridge Econometrics Ltd, Cambridge Steiner School, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Water Company, Canoe2, Carter Jonas, Cemex, Center Parcs Woburn Forest, Centrica (Peterborough Power Station), Ciconi Ltd, Colpac Ltd, Cranfield University, David Ball Group, Dojima Sake Brewery, Downing College Cambridge, Emmanuel College, Granta Park, Greens of Soham Ltd, Hellidon Lakes Golf & Spa Hotel, Highgate House, Hunts Wildlife Landscapes, The Jordans & Ryvita Company Ltd, Kier Living Ltd, KierWSP, Lockhart Garratt Ltd, Mackays, The Marshall Group of Companies, Moulton College Ltd, Middle Level Commissioners, NFU Mutual Cambridge, PalmerSport, Perkins Engines Co Ltd, Richard Buxton Environmental & Public Law, Roem Ltd, RPS Group, RWE Generation UK, South Cambs District Council, Spendlove Contracting, Tarmac, Trinity College, University of Northampton, Vine House Farm, Weetabix, Wellcome Genome Campus, Wesley Coe, Whittlebury Park, Willowbrook Construction, Wyboston Lakes.

We would also like to thank the following who have supported the Trust financially and helped us in kind:

Anglian Water (EA Mitigation), The Animal Experience, Alpro Soya, Arjuna Wholefoods, Ark House Veterinary Surgery, Arqiva, Arm, Cambridge Building Society, Cambridge Cheese Co., Cambridge Fencing, Cambridge Festival of Running, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Water Pebble Fund, Canoe2, Carter Jonas, Center Parcs, ClickASkip, Dora Mouse, Ecclesiastical Grant, Elsworth Community Shop, Flamingo Flowers, FlexEservices, Force 36, Granta Park, Grosvenor Developments Ltd, Hewitsons, Hunt & Coombs, Hunts Local Group, Inner Wheel District 7, Jordans & Ryvita Company, Manor School Sports College, Kier, Nationwide Building Society, Opticron, Polar Bearings, Prologis, Scudamore's Punting Company, St Ives Electric Riverboat Co., St Neots St Mary's Rotary Club, SDC, Sentec, Shepreth Wildlife Park, Shoosmiths LLP, Silver Spirals, Tesco, Trumpington Meadows Land Company Ltd, Vets4Pets, Vine House Farm, Unilever Research Colworth, Waresley Garden Centre, Wyboston Lakes, Wildlife Travel.



By working together with House of Fraser we were shortlisted for the National Edie Sustainability Leaders Awards for 2018.

People and Culture

More than 1,000 volunteers and 109 full and part time staff are vital to the delivery of our work.

Volunteers are essential to all aspects of the Trust's work. Our nature reserve wardens and volunteers help to manage our nature reserves and to greet and help visitors; mid-week work-parties and corporate work-teams tackle conservation management tasks on reserves; Wildlife Watch Group leaders provide exciting activities for younger members; Local Group officers and committees ensure that a diverse and interesting range of talks, walks and events are available to members and the public throughout our area; Ecology Group volunteers monitor our nature reserves; office volunteers help with a huge range of tasks; and Trustees provide governance and support to the staff.

After volunteering with us Nicky Hennessy was inspired to follow a career in conservation:

“

My career with the Wildlife Trust BCN began as a Volunteer Reserve Officer at the Great Fen - the position was fundamental to my professional development. I got to be part of a phenomenal and forward thinking wetland restoration collaborative. I learned to drive tractors, fix bird hides, re-fit gateposts and learnt new monitoring techniques such as fixed point photography and water quality testing. The team gave me a real sense of belonging and achievement; all were supportive, knowledgeable and generous with biscuits and ice-cream, for which I will always be grateful. The same fabulous team encouraged me to take a salaried position as a summer reserve warden on Barnack Hills and Holes Nature Reserve. In turn this led to my current position as Lilbourne Meadows Reserve Officer, with the Northants team. Every day is an opportunity to develop my infrastructure maintenance and habitat management skills and experiences, and I totally love it.

”



Nicky Hennessy at work.

Finance - How we raised our money

This year, with particular thanks to our supporters and strategic partnerships, we spent nearly £5 million on protecting wildlife in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.

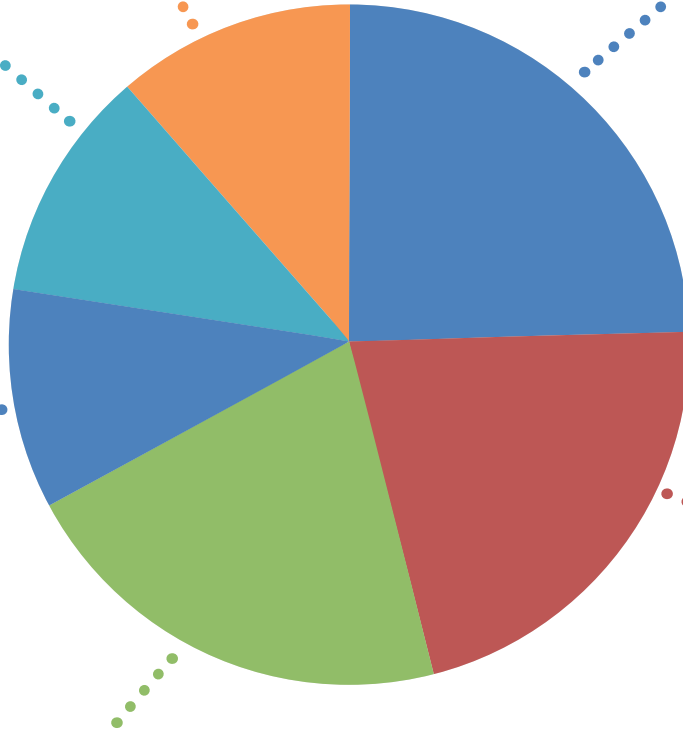
Investments and other income £623,517

Grants: £604,357:

Grants available to protect wildlife sadly continue to decline and competition for them has increased. We received around £400k less this year than last, meaning the donations from members and supporters are more vital than ever before.

Donations, legacies, appeals and sponsorships £567,809:

Thank you to everyone who donated to an appeal this year, undertook a sponsored challenge, put on a fundraising event or made a donation. Special thanks to those who left us a gift in their will.



Membership £1,338,840:

Our members (along with gift aid) remain our biggest support providing the biggest part of our income. This money is vital as it is not restricted to specific projects and allows us to extend our work to areas that will achieve the most positive impact for wildlife.

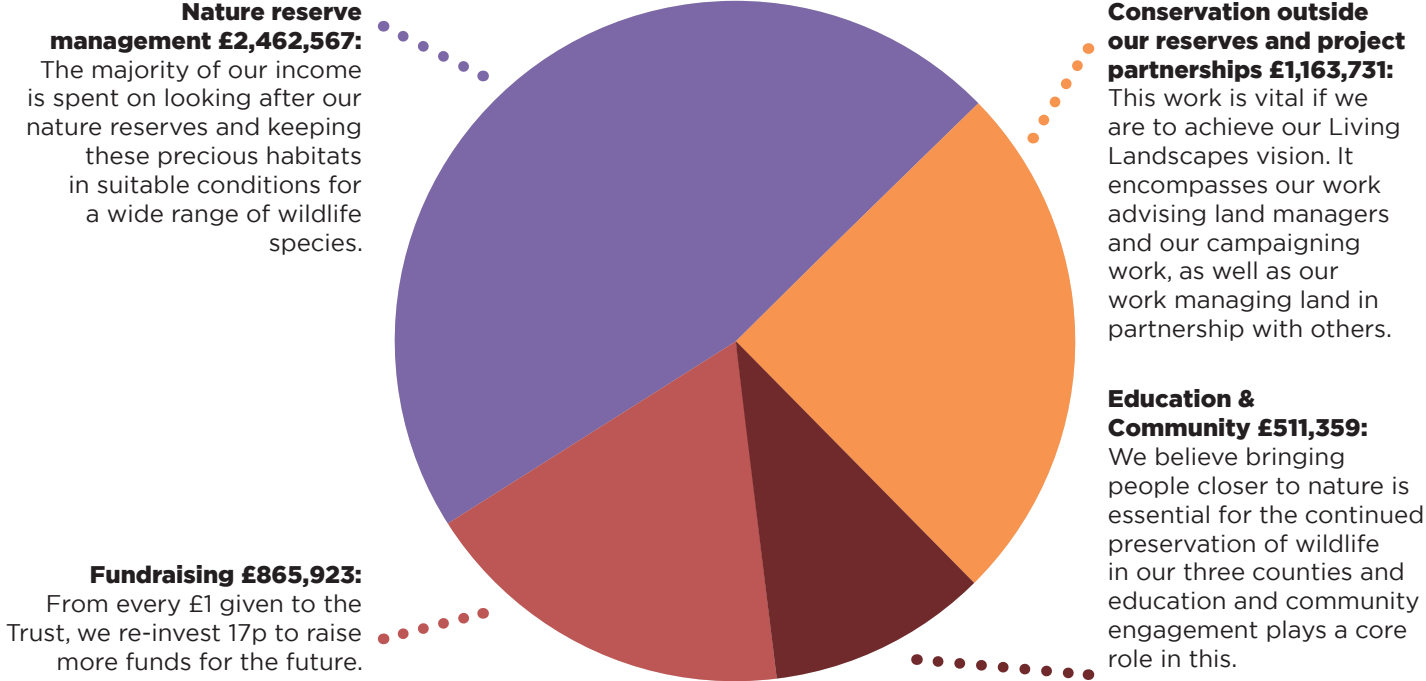
Rural Payments Agency (RPA) £1,173,908:

This year the RPA conceded that we were owed land management grants that we should have received over the last two years but which were held back. This figure includes back payments and so is higher than in previous years and will not be so high in future years.

Service agreements for green space advice, management and education: £1,144,753:

We are actively working on sustainable sources of funding, such as gold standard partnerships with property developers, to ensure we can do more for wildlife by operating as sustainably as possible.

How we spend our money



Financial reserves

We hold a small surplus of funds, in part due to grants (restricted funds) we have received but are required to spend in the coming years, and also some (unrestricted funds) to ensure we have a degree of stability during our day to day charitable work and can plan for efficient application of our scarce resources. These financial reserves allowed the Trust to continue running as normal while we were fighting for two years for over £1 million of grants which we were due from the Rural Payments Agency.

To find out more about our finances, download our Annual Report wildlifebcn.org/AnnualReports

About the Wildlife Trust BCN

The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire (BCN) is a grass-roots charitable organisation, supported by over 1,000 volunteers and over 33,000 members.

By collaborating with 45 similar Wildlife Trusts covering the UK, we are part of a movement started by Charles Rothschild in 1915 all with the same goal: conservation of nature and wildlife and inspiring people about the natural world.

All of these Wildlife Trusts are affiliated to the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts. Working together in this way, with over 800,000 supporters, we are able to achieve national impact on key policies affecting wildlife, whilst maintaining our local roots and our ability to act quickly for wildlife locally.

We care for the wildlife and countryside in our three counties and manage over 100 nature reserves and nine Living Landscapes.



Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire

www.wildlifebcn.org

The Wildlife Trust BCN **@wildlifebcn**

Company number: 2534145 Registered charity number: 1000412

Front cover photo: Taken by Guy Pilkington, a winner in our new annual photography competition.