

# Annual Review 2018-2019

The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire,  
Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire



**Bedfordshire  
Cambridgeshire  
Northamptonshire**

Company Registration No 2534145 (England and Wales). Registered Charity No. 1000412

Photo: Our North Chilterns Chalk Living Landscape  
Image: Robert Enderby

# Chairman's introduction

I sense that over the past year there has been a heightened awareness of environmental challenges among the British public. Such issues as pollution from plastics and climate change have been highlighted by Sir David Attenborough, the Extinction Rebellion protesters and many others. The Wildlife Trusts have played our part in this. Our film trailer "Wilder Future" was screened over 50,000 times in cinemas across the country, for example, and our campaign every June, "30 Days Wild", continues to attract new support.

The government has shown some understanding of these concerns in drafting its new Environment Bill, but it is far from perfect. We have been campaigning for it to be strengthened so that it will drive the creation and publication of Nature Recovery Networks — maps that identify the places wildlife needs in order to thrive — and ensure that a new "Green Watchdog" is independent and has sufficient powers to hold government to account.

Meanwhile, in our own area, a significant new threat to our wildlife has arisen from government plans to create an Oxford-Cambridge growth area, which would squeeze in an extra one million homes — the equivalent of 18 additional cities the size of Oxford — on top of current planned developments, plus the infrastructure to support them, including the Oxford to Cambridge expressway and the East-West Rail. We are concerned that plans are being promoted, and in some cases agreed by local authorities, without a thorough review of the environmental impacts, and we are working to ensure that the natural environment is properly considered. We are also supporting the legal action being pursued by the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust over the government's failure to hold proper environmental consultation for the proposed expressway.

In spite of these pressures, this has been a good year for our Trust. We benefit greatly from those supporters who leave money or assets in their wills to the Trust, and this year a particularly generous legacy from Mr HK Bean has reinforced our financial stability and will enable us to invest in our reserves and education work. The freehold of Woodwalton Fen, the heart of our Great Fen project, has been transferred to us

by the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts. We have developed further our partnerships with farmers and developers, e.g., through our Farming for the Future project and our cooperation with Jordans Farm, Prologis at Lilbourne, the Crown Estate at Rushden Lakes and Grosvenor at Trumpington Meadows. Our visitor centre has received 180,000 visits in its first full year, and we continue to engage with local communities across the three counties.

Each one of us has the power to do a little bit more to help our wildlife, and the sum of these actions can add up to something much bigger across the country. Whether it is putting up a swift box, making your garden wilder or encouraging children to experience nature, there is so much that we can do. Our website is full of guidance on how to go about it, and it is possible there to sign up to our new campaigning e-News bulletin.

This year, we are presenting our Annual Report in a new format. We have focussed on some key achievements from the last year, demonstrating the landscape scale impact of our work. More detail about any of these projects can be found on our website. We hope you find this approach to be both informative and engaging and we welcome your feedback.

None of the work we do would be possible without the continued support of our members and volunteers. We have ten volunteers for every member of staff, doing everything from checking sheep to monitoring bats to teaching children about wildlife. It is through our combined efforts that the successes described in this report have been achieved, and I would like to finish by warmly thanking everyone involved.



Graham Fry

Sir Graham Fry,  
Chairman of the Council

*"I am backing The Wildlife Trusts' campaign to rally people to secure a 'wilder future' by restoring large areas of wildlife habitat, in city and country. We know which wild places we should be protecting and expanding. But we need ambitious new laws to ensure we do this, laws that ensure we map out nature's recovery."*

Sir David Attenborough, President Emeritus of The Wildlife Trusts



## The scale of the challenge we are facing

**Over 1,000 species are known to be at risk of extinction in the UK alone**

(and they are only the ones we know about!)



**97% of our meadows** have been lost since the 1930s

**1 MILLION HOUSES** planned for Oxford Cambridge growth arc

**1 person**  
is all it takes  
to start making  
a difference  
for wildlife

### Living Landscape Partnerships

## Farming for the Future project launched

Farming for the Future is one of 16 projects that make up the Nenescape Landscape Partnership Scheme, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). The project provides grants and training for farmers and landowners across the Nene Valley to help restore and create meadow and wetland habitats; to increase

biodiversity across farmland; and to reduce soil erosion and run off in order to improve water quality in the River Nene.

Bulwick SSSI, pictured here, is one of the sites that has already benefitted from the scheme and been improved for wildlife.

## Living Landscapes

# New linkages in the Nene Valley Living Landscape

In November, we were pleased to open the Girder Bridge on the Nene Wetlands nature reserve following extensive re-engineering of the old bridge supports. Installation of the bridge has given local people direct access to Rushden Lakes retail area and to parts of the reserve for the first time in many years.

*This new structure will provide a vital link between the Greenway footpaths and cycleways around the lakes, giving people more opportunities to enjoy the wildlife our district has to offer.*

Cllr Steven North, Leader of East Northamptonshire Council

At Irthlingborough Lakes and Meadows we have trialled new grazing techniques involving

increased stock numbers and have successfully achieved a more appealing grassland for wintering birds, attracting birds such as wigeon to new areas.

Our Highland cattle remain a key feature of the Wilson's Pits area of the Nene Wetlands reserve and are well suited to grazing the wet terrain.

Skew Bridge has affectionately been renamed 'Bat Alley' and we have put on additional international bat night walks due to popular demand.

The Nene Valley is one of our eight Living Landscapes areas. All eight remain a core focus of our conservation activity, providing pivotal areas for a Nature Recovery Network.

## Reaching Out

# Nature Networks in the Nene

**4265 people** attended wildlife events in the Nene Wetlands

**413 volunteer hours** given to help run events

Around **180,000 people** visited our **Nene Wetlands visitor centre**

**48** evidence based nature recovery maps produced through the NLHF funded **Nene Valley Nature Improvement Area** partnership

**Nearly £4000 raised** for us over the last 5 years **by our friends Canoe2** through their Wildlife Paddles, Bat Walks and Dawn Chorus Strolls



Image: Katie King

Nature Reserves

## Space reserved for wildlife

**4,254 HECTARES**

of nature reserve managed by the Trust

**£27,500 RAISED**

through our Tough Love appeal

**8,893 PEOPLE**

visited our nature reserves page on our website

**208 hectares**

the size of Woodwalton Fen, the very first nature reserve, given to this Trust this year

**900 years ago**

Brampton Wood was first recorded in the Domesday Book

**15m tonnes**

of carbon dioxide annually removed from the atmosphere and stored by UK woodlands and forests

Image: Robert Enderby

Nature Reserves

## Woodland work

This year we paid special attention to our woodland nature reserves. We are custodians of many ancient woodlands, with veteran trees and swathes of woodland flowers entirely dependent on the continuity of woodland over many centuries.

For example, Waresley and Gransden Woods, adjoining ancient oak-ash-maple woods, contain displays of primrose, oxlip and bluebell in a woodland type restricted to a small area of eastern England. And Brampton Wood, the second largest ancient woodland in Cambridgeshire, was already an old wood when the Domesday Book was compiled in 1086. All are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest due to their diverse and rare flora and fauna.



Image: Philip Precey

It was a record year for Black Hairstreaks in Brampton

Restoring these precious habitats has become increasingly urgent due to the impact of past neglect and newly arrived pests and diseases. At Brampton, conifers planted as recently as the 20th century block out light,

The word dormouse translates literally as 'sleepy one'



Image: Gwen Hitchcock

chemically inhibit growth of native broadleaf trees, ground flora and other species due to needle drop and greatly

reduce the site's wildlife value. In all woods, a challenge is coming from the growing impact of ash die back — a major threat to the trees and the ecosystems they support.

This year we invested in new machines to improve the efficiency and scale of our woodland management. This kit has the capacity to move several tons of material at a time and is specially designed to be low impact in terms of ground pressure to ensure minimum disturbance to wildlife. It also includes a special winch, which can extract material without entering sensitive areas. The additional advantage is that the equipment enables us to extract and move the coppiced wood in a way that enables us to sell small amounts on, helping towards our goal to create diverse and sustainable income streams.

Working with the evidence

## Research at Brampton Wood

Our Monitoring & Research team have this year used a new drone technique called the 'normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI)'. Often used in agriculture to assess crop health, we have used the technique to undertake woodland surveys at Brampton Wood and to identify different types of tree — broadleaf trees show up here as orange and conifer as blue. We can use this to automatically map different habitat types quickly and accurately.

The findings help us monitor progress of our conifer removal and to ensure rare plants and animals such as bluebells, dormice, spotted flycatchers and black hairstreaks can flourish.

*"We aim to have a broad age range of trees because some species like older ones, or even dead wood, while others favour new growth. It is hard physical work, and sometimes noisy."*

Amanda Kent, Reserves Officer

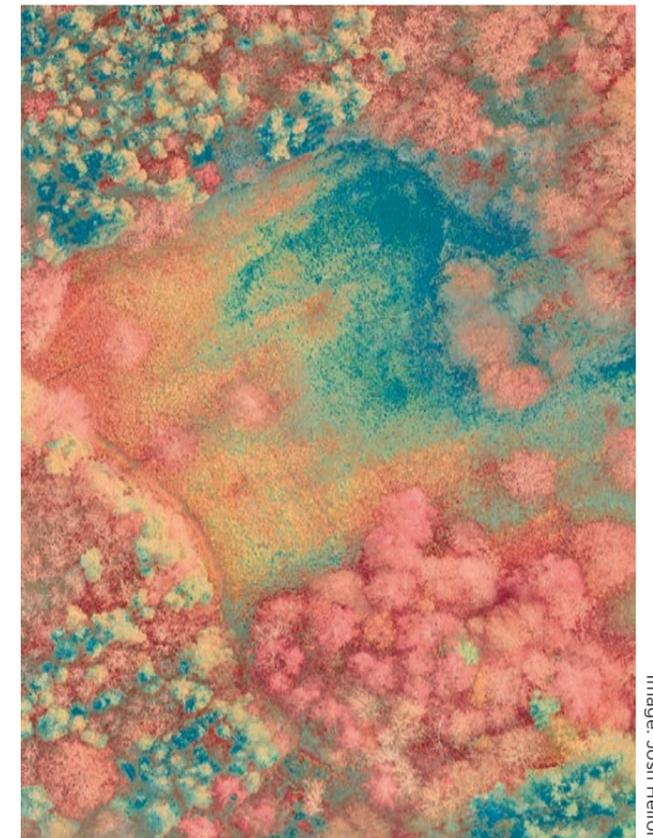


Image: Josh Hellen

Reaching Out

# Inspiring people from all walks of life

To achieve our vision of a Wilder Future we believe it is vital that we inspire others – and the younger generation in particular – to care for nature. Our Communities and Wildlife Team run a wide range of event and engagement activities across the three counties ensuring the wonders of the natural world are accessible for all to fall in love with.

## Experiencing nature with all the senses

Image: Nina Lutterer



This year, we embarked on a new project to bring nature to those who couldn't normally access it for health or mobility reasons. Hosting workshops for care homes near the

Great Fen, the groups used a range of senses to reconnect with natural objects and shared their photos and memories of nature. Our workshop with the Peterborough Association for the Blind (above) led to them making three dormouse boxes for us.

Image: Katie King



Image: Debbie McKenzie

## Site navigation got an upgrade

We launched a new mobile-friendly website this year ensuring this invaluable resource, packed with expert information about wildlife local to Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire, is now easily available on the go. Many of the pages have been updated, the navigation improved and on average people spent 40% longer on our website than last year.



Image: Debbie McKenzie

## 'The best bat experience in Britain'

Patrick Barkham, Journalist for the *Guardian*

### The secret is out!

The *Guardian* gave our prestigious bat punt tours – run in partnership with Scudamore's – national acclaim. With record ticket sales, Scudamore's donate 50% from all proceeds to us. That's over £10,000 this year, and over £40,000 since the partnership started back in 2012.



Image: Martin Bond

## Bigger reach, bigger impact

**3,000 schoolchildren**

were inspired about the natural world through our innovative school programmes

**2,409 people**

in our area took part in **30 Days Wild**

**Over 70,000**

'random acts of wildness' in June alone

**498,244**

web page visits

**Over 33,000**

members provide vital support that helps us restore and protect local wildlife

**52,132 people**

visited our website from their mobile

A survey found that, on average, people who took part in 30 Days Wild reported **better health and happiness** at the end of the month than at the start.



Image: Iain Webb



# Paths of the pipistrelle

Image: Gwen Hitchcock



The survey recorded a rare Nathusius' pipistrelle

Connecting isolated wildlife habitats into Nature Recovery Networks can be far easier when taking guidance from those who know best - in this case, the bats.

The Bat Pathfinder survey encompasses landscape-scale monitoring of woodland linkage projects and recording of bat flight paths to monitor the success of habitat creation and restoration techniques.

The first phase of the project was based in the Rockingham Forest Living Landscape area and focused on Short and Southwick Woods nature reserves in Northamptonshire.

Surveyors staked out each hedgerow connecting our woods for an hour after sunset and recorded flight paths in order to identify which hedges are most important in linking the landscape for bats. They also identified potential hedgerow restoration projects to fill any gaps, helping inform our landscape management.

Imagery © 2018 Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky © Google



Red points and arrows show the main routes that were monitored.

## On the crest of a wave

In 2013, Living Landscape Manager Laura Osborne — a licensed newt handler — started an annual survey of great crested newts in the pond at our HQ in Cambourne, later extending this to include surveys of two nearby ponds in Oaks Wood. Over this time, she has identified 80 newts from these ponds, analysing the belly patterns to identify returning newts. This research helps us understand more about the local newt population — how stable it is and what we can do to support its growth.

We are fortunate that great crested newts are widespread in Cambridgeshire and in places have large healthy populations. However, this is not the case across the whole of the species' range where intensification of agriculture in the late 20th century destroyed suitable breeding ponds and surrounding natural habitat.



Image: Laura Osborne

## Holding the records

**3** Local Records Centres supported by the Trust — independent organisations providing important data and resources

**443** data searches handled by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre (CPERC)

**341,740** species recorded on the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre databases in 2018

# The heroes putting in the hours

Volunteers are crucial in all areas of our work. From mid-week work parties, to admin support in the office, from ecological monitoring to running a Wildlife Watch Group. There are so many different ways that volunteers offer their time and help us achieve all that we do for local wildlife and for this, we are truly grateful.



Image: Caroline Fitton

A volunteer in our very first pop-up shop, in Queensgate, Peterborough

Image: Katie King



A thank you BBQ for volunteers in the Nene Valley

*"My highlight would be the extraordinary effort put in by our volunteers - it seems to get bigger each year, and it's not just people doing practical work but also stock checking - including feeding the cows and general wardening - it makes a real difference."*

Nancy Reed, Beds Reserves Manager

## Skilling up

Our renowned Wildlife Training Workshops continue to be well attended, enabling nature enthusiasts to deepen their natural history knowledge in a range of areas. All staff and regular volunteers are supported in taking part.



Our President, Baroness Young of Old Scone, presents volunteer Robin Bailey this year's Oliver Rackham Award

## And it's not just people...

The Trust rely on a range of animals to create the perfect habitats for wildlife. From sheep dogs to highland cattle, we couldn't do it without them.



Image: Cathy Wannwright

## Academic Accolades

In November our CEO, Brian Eversham, was made a Visiting Professor in the School of Water, Energy and Environment at Cranfield University. The move recognises the seriousness with which the Trust values our scientific credentials and our academic links.



**76,309** hours given by volunteers

**10** volunteers to every 1 member of staff

**12** local groups

**680** hours given by corporate employees through our Wild Work Days

**386** places filled on our Wildlife Training Workshops



Image: Tom Marshall

Gathering Evidence

## Monitoring the mainstreams

Connecting like arteries, the network of waterways across our three counties help the spread of wildlife and provide safe habitat. A well-structured river corridor also provides grassland and trees as corridors for meadow and woodland wildlife. But our water-loving wildlife also face many challenges, be it water pollution, invasive species or interference from grazing cows. The impact of these issues can quickly spread downstream — so there is much to be gained from our work to improve these aquatic routes.

Thanks to our conservation work with water voles in Cambridgeshire, it is one of the few places in the country bucking the tragic national decline of this species. With the hope of extending this success, this year we launched a Water Vole,

Otter and Mink Survey Project in the Nene Valley – training volunteers to help us gather data that will help us concentrate our conservation efforts effectively.

In Beds, volunteers taking part in our River Wardens Scheme were able to demonstrate the improvement of water quality across the whole county following a water quality workshop on testing for phosphates and nitrates. Together with our partners, the Beds Rural Communities Charity, The Greensand Trust, and the Environment Agency we held two events to share the results.

**The water vole is the UK's most rapidly declining mammal and has been lost from 94% of places where they were once prevalent.**

Local Wildlife Sites

## A campaign victory

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are key building blocks for any nature recovery network, forming the buffers and corridors that allow wildlife to move across our countryside and better survive. They do not have any legal protection and are protected purely through the goodwill of their owners, often individuals or organisations including businesses, charities, schools and estates.

It's been a roller-coaster year for Local Wildlife Sites. In spring 2018, the government proposed removing all reference to LWS from the National Planning Policy Framework, stripping away the little protection these sites have. But with the help of Wildlife Trust supporters who signed our campaign, LWSs have been reinstated.

### A 'net-gain' success

In Bedfordshire we achieved another win for wildlife as an area of land provided in mitigation for the Luton-Dunstable guided busway was this year awarded Local Wildlife Site status, following just five years of habitat creation and management. Surveying in 2017 has shown a marked improvement in the number and diversity of both plants and invertebrates.

*"This is an outstanding success for Esther and her team. It goes to prove that whilst there is always concern regarding loss of habitat with any construction project, particularly large projects like the Busway, with good planning, good management and dedicated teams it is possible to mitigate these losses and this story confirms this. Well done everyone."*

Dave Perry of Luton Borough Council

### A quick win for the slow-worm

Slow-worms, our only native legless lizards, have suffered severe declines across the country. The Luton-Dunstable guided busway was built along ideal slow-worm territory where they were thriving. Thanks to their protected status, any slow-worms that were found there prior to construction had to be relocated and were moved to three nearby wildlife

sites, including 902 to our Totternhoe nature reserve. We have been monitoring these populations for nine years and are delighted to report that all are breeding successfully and spreading from their release areas. We also found a good number, including juveniles and breeding females, still in the vicinity of the busway where it passes Blow's Downs.



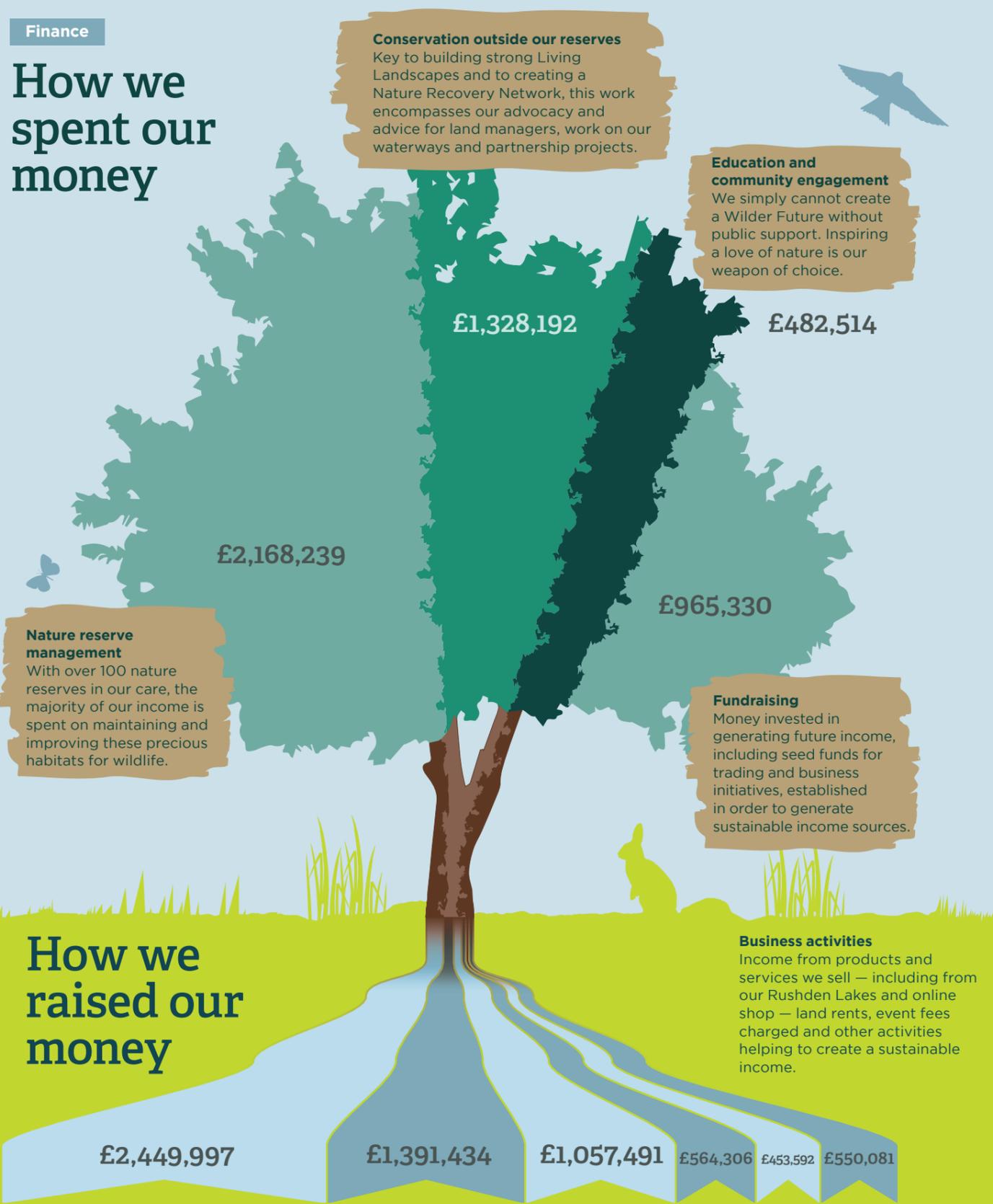
Image: Katharine Banham



Image: Josh Hellon

Finance

# How we spent our money



- Donations, legacies and corporate sponsorship**  
Enormous gratitude to everyone who donated to an appeal this year, held a fundraising event or kindly left us a gift in their will.
- Membership (and Gift Aid)**  
Our members and corporate members not only provide substantial unrestricted funds that can be used where the need is greatest, they also give strength to our voice when advocating and campaigning for wildlife.
- Land advice, advocacy and management contracts**  
Income resulting from partnerships with land owners such as councils and property developers where a net-gain for wildlife can be obtained.
- Rural Payments Agency (RPA)**  
Payments made by DEFRA for the environmental stewardship and management of land.
- Grants**  
Sadly we are continuing to see a decline in the number of grants available to protect wildlife, making other streams of income all the more vital.

Working Together

# Corporate supporters

We are committed to engaging with local companies to develop partnerships and secure support for a sustainable future for wildlife and a healthier environment for people who live and work in our area to enjoy. Our Wild Work Days continue to be popular, offering local businesses an energising team building experience, whilst also benefiting the local wildlife.

### Corporate Partners

- Arm Ltd
- The Biodiversity Consultancy
- Prologis UK Ltd

### Corporate Investors

- Anglian Water Services Ltd
- Arqiva Ltd
- Colpac Ltd
- Gardenworks Tree Surgery
- The Gonville Hotel
- Hewitsons
- Levin Sources
- Orton Hall Hotel and Spa
- Scott Bader
- Scudamore's Punting Company
- UK Power Networks
- Unilever Research Colworth

### Corporate Supporters

- Alpro Soya
- Athene Communications
- Cambridge Belfry Hotel
- Cambridge Econometrics Ltd
- Cambridge Steiner School
- Cambridge University Press
- Cambridge Water Company
- Campkins Cameras
- Cemex
- Center Parcs Woburn Forest
- Centrica (Peterborough Power Station)
- Ciconi Ltd
- Cranfield University
- Dojima Sake Brewery
- Downing College Cambridge
- Granta Park
- Greens of Soham Ltd
- Highgate House
- Holidaycottages.co.uk
- Hunts Wildlife Landscapes
- The Jordans & Ryvita Company Ltd
- Lockhart Garratt Ltd
- The Marshall Group of Companies
- Moulton College Ltd
- NFU Mutual Cambridge
- PalmerSport
- Perkins Engines Co Ltd
- Richard Buxton Environmental & Public Law
- Roem Ltd
- RPS Group
- Rutland Cycling
- RWE Generation UK
- South Cambs District Council
- Spendlove Contracting
- Tarmac
- University of Northampton
- Weetabix
- Wellcome Genome Campus
- Wesley Coe
- Whittlebury Park
- Willowbrook Construction

### Our Affinity Scheme members include:

- Canoe2, Opticron, Scudamore's Punting Company, Vine House Farm, Wildlife Travel



Image: Siemens Wild Work Day at Pitsford Water nature reserve, by Dave Jackson



### Wildlife Gardening at Work Awards 2018

Cranfield University were the overall winner for Best Wildlife Garden, and were recognised for their linked up wildlife spaces and for their wonderful efforts to involve staff and students in the skills of bee-keeping (pictured). Kier took best use of recycled materials in a wildlife garden and Downing College won best wildlife sighting for a sparrowhawk spotted in their grounds.

# Highlights



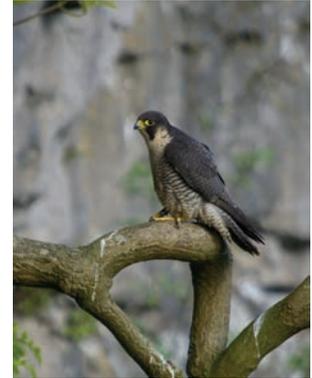
Lesser-spotted woodpecker at Grafham Water and Brampton Wood, two of the few remaining places it is resident in Cambs. Image: Stefan Johansson



Over 6,600 green winged orchids at Upwood Meadows NNR. Image: Paul Lane



Norfolk hawkers have been recorded at Felmersham Gravel Pits. Image: Danny Green/2020Vision



Peregrines and chick spotted in Cambridgeshire Chalks Living Landscape. Image: Neil Aldridge



A rare white-spotted bluethroat visited the Great Fen over the summer. Image: Amy Lewis



A fox snapped by a winner of our annual photo competition this year. Image: Sarah Kelman



The great crested newts population in Peterborough was the largest in Europe.



Nightingales recorded again at Grafham Water. Image: Chris Gomersall/2020Vision



Backs goldilocks buttercups, one of 17 species of goldilocks buttercup found only in our counties, snapped at St John's College Backs, Cambridge. Image: Brian Eversham



Bluebells carpeted our woodland floors in spring, despite challenges posed by visitors inadvertently trampling and widening paths. Image: Sophie Baker



Common blue butterfly, another winner in our photo competition. Image: Matthew Hazelton



500+ golden plovers at Summer Leys. Image: David Tipling/2020Vision

*"We all need to get behind The Wildlife Trusts, rise up and call for a wilder future."*

Stephen Fry, President of the Great Fen



wildlifebcn.org



Bedfordshire  
Cambridgeshire  
Northamptonshire