NUMBER 1 ◆ MAY 1994

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Caring for the Countryside

Wildlife action

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The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough aims to conserve and promote the natural environment for the benefit of wildlife, people, and future generations. Our Wildlife Trust is part of a nationwide network of local Trusts dedicated to all aspects of wildlife protection.

Reg. Charity No: 1000412

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Front cover:
The head and thorax of the southern hawker. For more about dragonflies in the three counties, please see pages 10–16. Photo by Ian Johnson.

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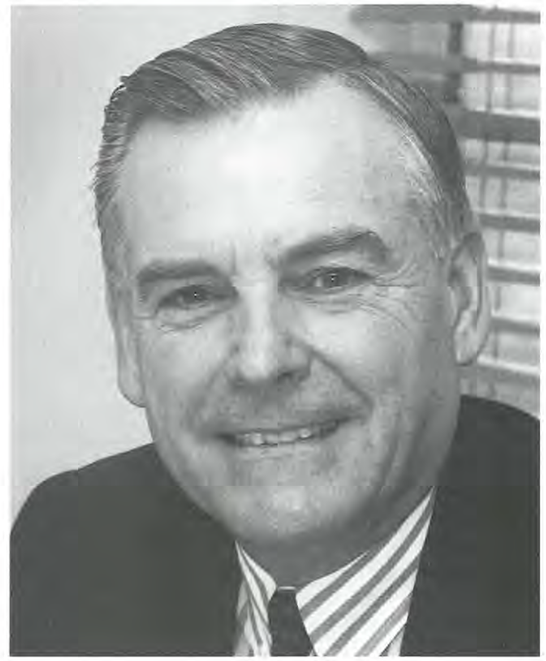
Putting wildlife on the map

Alec Cooper, Trust Director, describes how our merger will put wildlife on the map for good.



Bimbling has long been part of our family vernacular. When we began to use it I'm not sure, but it means taking a slow, leisurely country walk with birding and botanising en route.

Whatever the time of year, there is nothing I like better than planning a family bimble. Grabbing the latest Reserves Guide and the relevant OS map, I look for geographical clusters of reserves. Perhaps two or three visits are possible on a day out.

The time of year influences the choice. Autumn suggests woodlands with their array of colourful and sometimes dangerous fungi, all in a golden autumn setting.

In winter we tend to turn to wetlands with vast numbers of wildfowl on flooded washes, reservoirs or gravel pits. Perhaps a short-eared owl will hunt along the bank or a flock of whoopers or brent geese will fly overhead.

The choice in spring is either woodlands or wetlands. The woodlands are carpeted with wood anemones, bluebells, ramsons and oxlips and we can search for the first singing chiffchaff, cuckoo, brimstone or early-purple orchid. It is the spring migrants which make the wetlands worth visiting – an osprey heading for Scotland, the first sand martins and swallows, yellow wagtails, little ringed plovers and common terns.

For summer the choice has to be chalk grassland, richer in species per square metre than any other English habitat. The spectacular pasque flowers are followed by wild thyme, clustered bellflower, gentians and my own especial favourites, the orchids – common spotted, fragrant, bee and lizard, all as fresh and exciting as when I saw them for the first time. Where there are flowers there will also be butterflies – chalkhill and common blues, Duke of Burgundy fritillary and brown argus.

A return to the woodlands shows them to be alive with birds singing and drumming to establish their territories. The rides are full of sun and their own special butterflies – speckled wood, white admiral and hairstreaks.

There is so much to see, hear and enjoy. What better way is there to ensure the future of our countryside than to let people experience the beauty and excitement themselves? Once they value the experience and feel that they 'own' it, they will realise the importance of our work and will join us in protecting our natural heritage for future generations.

Our newly merged Trust now allows members the choice of over 120 nature reserves. Some have been designated as National Nature Reserves, in recognition of their national and even international importance. Many are Sites of Special Scientific Interest. And all are of local importance, especially those urban sites which provide oases amidst concrete jungles.

Even when a site is designated by English Nature, the Government's nature conservation agency, as a Site of Special Scientific Interest it does not have complete protection against destruction, as the decisions over Twyford Down in Hampshire have shown only too brutally.

Now we have the proposed merger between English Nature and the Countryside Commission. We have to wonder whether the outcome of this merger will be in the best interests of conservation. The Trust is dependent on both the existing Government bodies for support for reserve management, interpretation and visitor access. We shall be using the power of our new Trust to lobby forcibly for the best outcome for wildlife in our patch of England.

At least we know that the reserves owned by the Trust are in safe hands. To help you plan your visits there are *The Wildlife of Peterborough, Nature Reserves in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire* and several leaflets about reserves in Northamptonshire. These are available at your local Trust office.

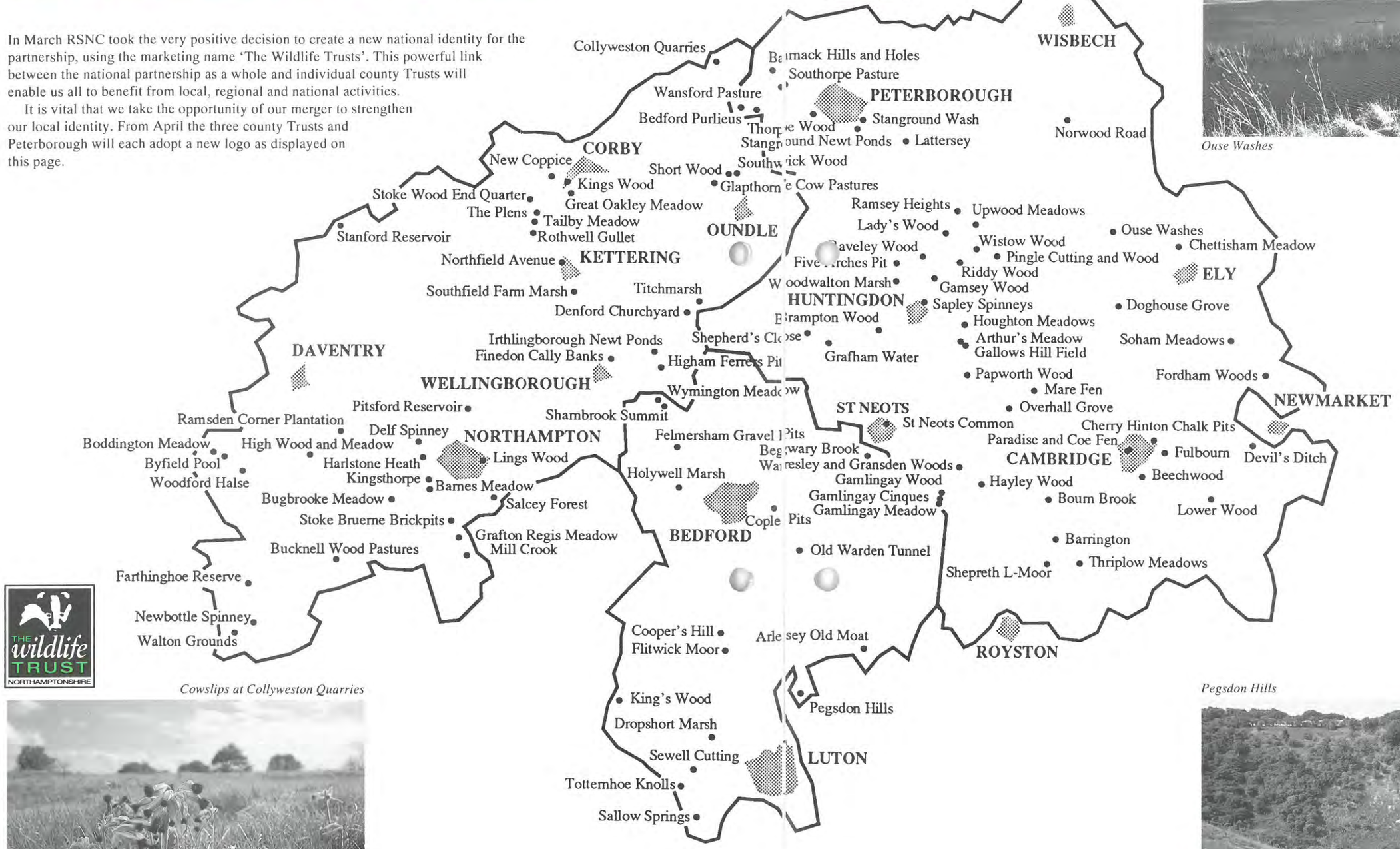
So far I've managed to visit twenty of the 120 reserves, which means that there are plenty of bimbles for me to plan. I look forward to sharing them with you and hope to meet some of you this year when exploring the rich wildlife heritage we all share and cherish.

Strengthening our national and local profile

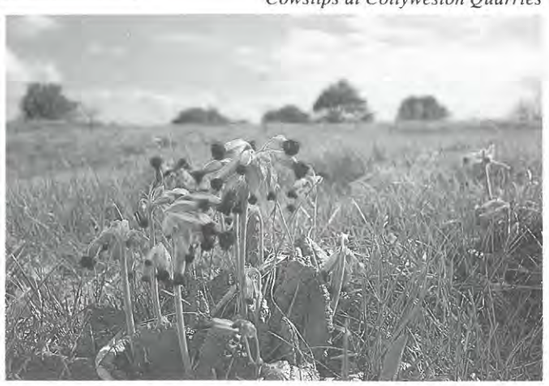
In March RSNC took the very positive decision to create a new national identity for the partnership, using the marketing name 'The Wildlife Trusts'. This powerful link between the national partnership as a whole and individual county Trusts will enable us all to benefit from local, regional and national activities.

It is vital that we take the opportunity of our merger to strengthen our local identity. From April the three county Trusts and Peterborough will each adopt a new logo as displayed on this page.

Ouse Washes



Cowslips at Collyweston Quarries



Pegsdon Hills

Creative conservation at Pegsdon Hills

This superb chalk grassland reserve in the south of Bedfordshire will become even better with the Trust's imaginative plans for its management.

Pegsdon Hills was bought by the Trust two years ago because of its wonderful herb-rich chalk grassland. But included in the purchase was an area of 100 acres of arable land.

That land, which has not been cropped for two years, is now set to become herb-rich grassland, but it will be several decades into the next century before we see its full potential.

The importance of the Trust's re-creation scheme at Pegsdon has been recognised by an award from the Anglian Water Conservation Award Scheme and grant aid from the Barclays Bank Nature Reserve Fund.

The restoration is being done in three different ways. An area of 30 acres has been ploughed and harrowed twice to produce a topsoil receptive to grass seed. The farmer from whom we purchased the site drilled and sowed the grass seed last May. When it was sown hand-collected seeds from chalk plants were thrown in with it, but on the advice of English Nature the Trust will not be introducing other seeds and any spread of herbs will be by natural regeneration.

The second area, 42 acres along the western border, will not be seeded. On the advice of English Nature, it will be left with soil disturbance kept to a minimum and will be regenerated naturally. Already this land is showing some interesting changes with patches of white mustard, knotgrass and fumitory appearing. By leaving the soil untouched we shall able to see how the land has been used in the past and allow time for the nitrogen from fertilisers to be leached from the soil.

The third sector of the regeneration is 28 acres on which hand-collected seed from elsewhere on the reserve has been broadcast. The seed-rich arisings from hay cut on the valley floor has been strewn on this field.

Pupils from Hexton Primary School help to sow grass seed at Pegsdon.

Thanks to Silsoe College we have a method of monitoring the establishment of grassland on former arable fields.

Grazing will be the key to management of the grasslands at Pegsdon. At present a flock of 50 sheep is grazing the reserve. These are owned by a local farmer, whose reason for having sheep is commercial.

Using sheep to manage chalk grassland can be labour-intensive because the flock needs to be moved on a daily basis from one part of the reserve to another to encourage regeneration. Also in sheep-rearing terms the quality of the grazing is low, and older, less commercially profitable breeds are better able to cope with it. This means that there is a possibility of the Chalk Grassland Management Cooperative, which consists of the County Council, the Trust and the National Trust, having run its own flock.

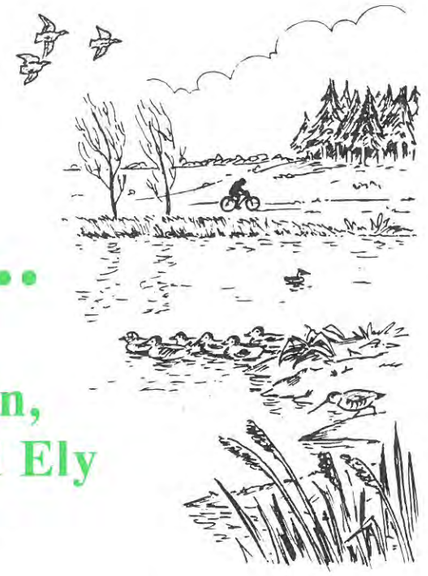
Other aspects of management are labour-intensive and very much dependent on the efforts of volunteers. Overall responsibility for management rests with Andy Fleckney (the reserves officer at Bedford) and he has professional advice from staff at English Nature, Countryside Commission and Silsoe College. But it is the volunteer effort from our members and from BTCV work parties that will make this beautiful reserve even more important than it already is.

Pegsdon Hills is at the eastern end of the Chilterns. The nearest town is Hitchin, five miles to the east. Take the B655 west from Hitchin or east from Barton-le-Clay to the village of Pegsdon. The reserve lies to the south of the village on the opposite side of the road.

Out and about ...

around Northampton, Bedford and Ely

with Nick Langley.



Northampton

Four Trust reserves are within reach of walkers and cyclists starting from Northampton. Harlestone Heath, a rare strip of acid heathland, left as a firebreak in the surrounding pine woods, can be approached along the bridleway from the A428 (OS SP712638), or by the footpath from Harlestone (SP708642). Other paths enter from the direction of Church Brampton, through Fox Covert. Besides heathland plants such as petty whin, green-ribbed sedge and flea sedge, the reserve is notable for glow-worms and the occasional barn owl.

Half a mile along the A428 on the other side of Harlestone village, a bridlepath leads to the Delf Spinney, an area of streams, woodland and wet and dry grassland, with a pond, and a rich aquatic and meadow flora.

Most of Pitsford Reservoir is surrounded by footpaths. The reservoir is an SSSI by virtue of its importance for wintering wildfowl. The area north of the causeway is managed by the Trust, by agreement with Anglian Water.

Pitsford is also a resting place for migrating waders, and occasional rarities. The variety of grassland, woodland and marshy habitats supports a rich flora and associated insect life.

Lings Wood, the Trust's Northampton headquarters, can be reached by taking the A4500 from the town centre to half a mile beyond the Weston Favell shopping centre, and then turning north for a further half mile until you see the signpost for the Trust office.

Ely

For cyclists, the area around Ely provides plenty of easy routes along old fen droves which avoid the main roads. Having said that, the landscape offers little in the way of wildlife interest until you reach the Ouse washes.

The most interesting sites are close to Ely itself. But on a fine day, the route to Littleport via Queen Adelaide along the River Ouse, passing the sugar beet factory settling beds on the way out of Ely, is pleasant enough. The unpromising-looking settling beds are home to breeding wildfowl and waders and they attract many passing migrants including rarities. Return via California and Little Downham.

Some of the roadside ditches in the fens sustain a variety of life including dragonflies. You may see sedge warblers, reed buntings and, especially from late summer onwards, the occasional kingfisher.

Walk: The Bishop's Way

This follows the route in the Cambridgeshire County Council's leaflet but there is an additional loop to take in Roswell Pits (see p. 158, *Reserves Guide*).

The pits can be reached via the bridleway about 200 yards up Brays Lane, beyond the agricultural machinery factory. Or you can walk beside the river, starting from Maltings and going north, under the railway and across the water meadows, until you come to the road through the Anglian Water works, which passes between the flooded pits. You can rejoin the Bishop's Way by continuing up the road to Prickwillow Road.

The Chettisham Meadows reserve (see p. 70, *Reserves Guide*), which you pass about halfway round the Bishop's Way, is a rare example of a flowering meadow, notable for hundreds of green-winged orchids found here in late spring and early summer.

Bedford

Priory Country Park, where the Trust has its Bedford office, can be reached on foot from the centre of the town, by following the River Ouse eastwards or from the A603. The 200 acres of reclaimed and landscaped gravel pits, reedbeds, woodland and meadow have something of interest for all naturalists.

A couple of miles further east along the A603 there is the Trust's Cople Pits reserve, lying on the righthand side just before the turn to Cople. There are 11 flooded pits, which are noted for their dragonflies.

Cycle route

Six miles north-west of Bedford are the Felmersham Gravel Pits (see p. 40, *Reserves Guide*), an SSSI including flooded workings, reedbeds, scrub and woodland beside the River Ouse. Once clear of Bedford and the A6, the country lanes leading to Felmersham are ideal for cycling.

Turn left from the A6 at Clapham and pass through Oakley, Pavenham and Felmersham. The reserve lies north-west of the river. Alternatively, turn off the A428 at Bromham, and ride north to Oakley. If you have time and energy left, you could cycle two miles through Sharnbrook and into Souldrop for the Trust's reserves at Sharnbrook Summit and Wymington Meadows (pp. 56 and 60, *Reserves Guide*).

Your Guide to Nature Reserves in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire is available from the Trust at £6.95.

Attracting dragonflies

Nancy Dawson on the way to make your pond dragonfly-friendly.

Not often do I emerge from a chemist's shop grinding my teeth. But some years ago a prominent advertisement really made me cross. It was lauding some lotion to keep off stinging insects and the creature they had chosen as an illustration was, of course, a dragonfly.

Dragonflies do not sting and they do not suck blood. They actually eat prodigious numbers of blood-sucking midges and mosquitoes. Therefore, if we feel we must divide insects into 'goodies' and 'baddies', they are definitely on the side of the angels.

In addition, their colours are fantastic and their lives are full of drama. They are also large enough to watch with a decent pair of binoculars and an increasing number of people regard them with interest and affection.

So how do you attract them into your garden? It is quite simple – you make a pond. Dragonflies spend most of their lives underwater as rather ugly larvae. These used to be called nymphs or naiads, a most inappropriate name as anything less like a beautiful aquatic maiden is hard to imagine.

Your pond needs a good growth of waterweeds and some silt or mud at the bottom to give cover to these larvae, as they feed by hiding until a small creature swims by to be seized with the pincer-like structures beneath the larvae's heads. After a year or more in the pond the larvae have the urge to crawl upwards towards the air and once out of the water they undergo a remarkable transformation into winged adults.

To allow them to do this it is vital to have plenty of suitable plants with their bases under the water and their tops sticking out. These can be planted in soil in the pond shallows and in containers, raised on bricks if necessary. Books on ponds list good types of emergent plants to try. Do avoid vigorous spreaders like reeds, pond sedge and bulrushes.

The new adults are pale and ghost-like. Their maiden flight is short, which means that the shelter of plants near the pond can help the dragonflies to survive. Such plants are also useful for amphibians.

Finally the pond needs a tall hedge or screen of trees and bushes to protect it from winds, but these should not overhang the ponds. The shelter provides hunting grounds on the leeward side and good places to roost overnight.

Dragonflies are rapid colonisers. A sheltered sunny pond with plenty of weed and emergent vegetation in our area will soon attract four or five species. The first to appear in May are two slim-line damselflies – the blue-tailed and the azure. Also flying in May is the broad-bodied chaser.

Next, in late June, comes the common darter and, the largest species at 75 mm, the southern hawker. The darter likes to make sorties from some conspicuous object such as stone or a log. It was this engaging character that I saw trying to lay eggs in a new pond before there was any water in it.

Ian Johnson

Common darter emerges from its larval case (exuvium).

Plant Sales and Open Gardens

Each year Nancy Dawson organises a series of open gardens and plant sales and raises impressive funds for the Trust.

This year's programme appears below.

Sunday 24 April	*The Old House, Ickwell Green, Bedfordshire
Sunday 15 May	*No 1 Vicarage Drive, Grantchester, Cambridgeshire
Sunday 29 May	*The Old House, Ickwell Green, Bedfordshire
Sunday 26 June	*Spring Hill, Little Staughton, Bedfordshire
Sunday 4 September	Grafham Water Nature Reserve, Cambridgeshire
Sunday 25 September	Hinchingbrooke Country Park, Huntingdonshire

**Home-made teas available.*

All gardens are open from 2.00 – 5.30 pm.

All the sales specialise in wild plants and unusual perennials. **Please support your local plant sale and open garden.**

In addition to attending the sale you can help by making cakes or simply sending a donation. Please telephone either the Bedford (0234 364213) or Trumpington (0223 846363) offices for details.

Dragonflies in the garden

Ian Johnson describes some exciting insects found in garden ponds and invites your help in a simple survey.

Dragonflies and damselflies are beautiful and fascinating insects. They are among the world's most ancient inhabitants. Insects very similar to today's dragonflies hunted in the Carboniferous forests 300 million years ago. Fossil dragonflies, some with two-foot wingspans, have been found in coal deposits. This means that 150 million years before the first bird dragonflies were flying.

They belong to the order of insects known as Odonata. The true dragonflies are the larger, faster flying species: damselflies are their smaller, more slender-bodied cousins. Both are collectively described as dragonflies.

Throughout their life cycle dragonflies are predators, feeding on any live prey that they can catch.

It is the brightly coloured, winged adults with which people are most familiar. They are usually seen hunting small insects or defending territories on ponds and rivers during the summer months. This, though is only a small proportion of the life cycle and lasts only a few weeks.

Most of the dragonfly's life is spent in the aquatic larval stage, hiding in cover to ambush passing animals. Some large dragonflies may spend three or four years or longer as larvae, most damselflies and dragonflies complete their life-cycles within a year.

The transformation from larva to adult is remarkable. The fully grown larva climbs up a plant stem out of water, almost always at night. Over the next two or three hours the adult emerges from the larval skin. At first the wings are tiny, but fluid is pumped through the network of veins to expand them and by dawn the adult is ready to make its maiden light.

When the adult has flown, the cast larval skin, or exuvia, is left clinging to the vegetation on which it emerged. Exuviae, which may remain for several days or even weeks, can with difficulty be identified to species. They are potentially of great value for surveys, because they provide conclusive proof that a larva has developed to the adult stage in a particular water body.

It is not until several days after emergence that the adults attain their mature coloration. During this immature or teneral stage they tend to avoid water, probably to avoid harassment from mature, territorial dragonflies. Males are usually more brightly coloured than females and it is the males which are more frequently encountered, defending territories from other males. Females usually visit water just to mate and lay eggs.

Today there are almost 5,000 species of dragonfly in the world, mostly in tropical and sub-tropical regions. Only about 40 species occur in Britain, over half of them within our three counties. Of particular note is the scarce chaser which has strong colonies in Cambridgeshire, but is scarce elsewhere.

Despite their long history, dragonflies now face major threats to their continued existence. Man-made problems, primarily the drainage and pollution of wetlands, mean that some species face extinction. In Britain three species have disappeared in recent decades, because of pollution or loss of habitat. Many others have become rarer as wetlands have disappeared.

But it is not all gloom and doom. One new wetland habitat that has increased is the garden pond. A survey of Cambridgeshire's dragonflies over the last three years suggests that in some areas garden ponds are one of the most important dragonfly habitats. One species, the broad-billed chaser, is particularly associated with this man-made habitat.

➤ *p. 16*

Ian Johnson

Male ruddy darter.

Ashton Water Dragonfly Sanctuary

Outside Japan there is only one nature reserve dedicated specifically to the conservation and promotion of dragonflies. And it is to be found in Northamptonshire. Ashton Water Dragonfly Sanctuary is on Miriam Rothschild's estate to the east of Oundle at Ashton Wold.

The reserve is open every Saturday and Sunday throughout August from 10 am to 4 pm with three guided tours each day. Over 15 species of dragonflies and damselflies have been recorded at Ashton Water.

Dragonflies in the garden

Ruddy darter

Common darter

Yellow flag

Branched bur-reed

Broad-bodied chaser

Blue-tailed damselfly

Migrant hawker

Southern hawker

Azure damselfly

Broad-leaved pondweed

Yellow water-lily

Common water-crowfoot

Flowering-rush

Emperor dragonfly

Spiked water-milfoil

Common blue damselfly

Marestail

Rigid hornwort

Fringed water-lily

Red-eyed damselfly

CM

THE wildlife TRUSTS

The Trust is launching a survey to investigate the importance of garden ponds for dragonflies. We want to see how many species visit garden ponds and breed in them. If you have a garden pond or access to one, there is a recording form on the inside back cover of this magazine.

All you need to do is to identify the species visiting the pond and to record their behaviour (feeding, mating, egg-laying). Because dragonflies are most active in warm sunny weather from April to September, the survey can be carried out as you sunbathe by the pond.

Our centre spread will help with identification and a simple key is given below to help further.

Dragonflies will sometimes lay eggs in water bodies that are not suitable for the larvae to complete their development. So, although recording egglaying is important, the real test of a pond's value to dragonflies is whether a species can successfully complete its development there. Look out for larval exuviae on stems of emergent vegetation. If you find any, collect them carefully and send them to the Trust for identification (35 mm film containers make ideal packaging).

Identifying dragonflies

At first glance it might appear difficult to identify an individual insect to species, but, by considering obvious characters such as overall colour and behaviour, it is easy to limit the choice to one or two species. The following guide provides some useful tips.

The first question to ask is: is it a dragonfly or damselfly?

- A dragonfly is large, fast-flying, resting with wings open.
- A damselfly is smaller, thin-bodied, slow flying, resting with wings closed.

Top: Four-spotted chaser.
Bottom: Male variable damselfly.

Ian Johnson

Ian Johnson

Dragonflies

Dragonflies can be divided into a number of groups on the basis of shape, size and behaviour.

Hawkers are large, long-bodied, fly for long periods, resting with body vertical. Species include:
Emperor: very large; rarely seen settled; males blue, females green.
Brown hawker: very large; wings tinted orange-brown.
Southern hawker: large; two large apple-green marks on thorax.
Migrant hawker: medium sized; paired blue spots on abdomen; small marks on thorax.

Chasers are medium sized; broad, flattened bodies; dark bases to wings; perch often, horizontally or vertically. Species include:
Broad-bodied chaser: very broad-bodied, males blue.
Four-spotted chaser: spot in middle of front edge of each wing. Body mainly brown.

Darters are small, red or brownish, with more or less cylindrical abdomen; settle frequently, often on ground. Species include:
Ruddy darter: legs black, male bright red.
Common darter: legs black with pale markings.

Damselflies

Damselflies can be distinguished mainly by obvious colour differences, but females can be tricky. The guide refers mainly to males.
Common blue damselfly (male): thick blue stripes on top of thorax. Side of thorax blue. Second segment of abdomen marked with a dot on a stalk.
Azure damselfly (male): thin blue stripes on top of thorax. Side of thorax blue with thin black lines. Second segment of abdomen marked with three sides of rectangle.
Red-eyed damselfly (male): larger species, often perching on floating vegetation. **Black** body with blue tail and sides of thorax. Eyes red.
Blue-tailed damselfly (male and female): smaller species. **Black** body with blue tail, eye spots and stripes on thorax.
Large red damselfly (male and female): predominantly red with some black markings.

Stepping out for wildlife

Two hundred walkers stepped out along the Ouse Valley last October and raised over £5,000 for the Trust. There was a choice of two walks, a three-mile family walk or a ten-mile yomp for the fit (or foolish).

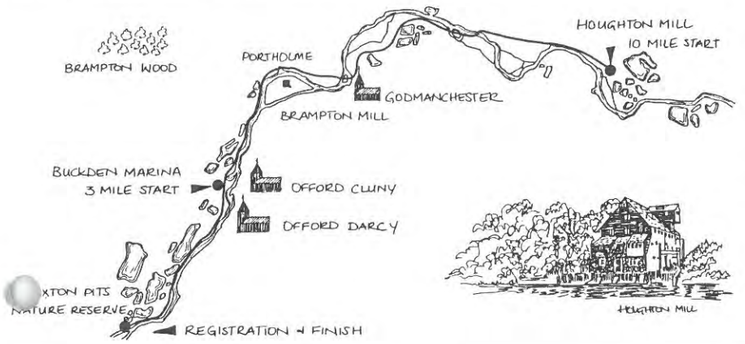
Several corporate members took part and the group from BT organised by Jackie Withers raised £500. Other companies who joined in were Marshall of Cambridge and Living and Learning. Other groups who joined in were Scouts, Guides, school groups and sports clubs as well as 12 of the Trust's staff (and from the state of some of them next morning it was easy to tell which were office staff and which were conservation staff).

BT's Jackie Withers (left) and Janet Burnet read about the Trust's Sponsored Walk, having received their corporate membership certificate.

Wildlife Walk 94!

This year the date for the Wildlife Walk is Sunday 18 September. We want double the number of walkers we had last year. **Our target is 400.**

The venue was so popular we shall once again be stepping out along the Ouse Valley Way. Registration will take place at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve, near St Neots, and coaches will drop of the walkers either at Buckden Marina (3 miles) or Houghton Mill (10 miles). It's a great way to spend a Sunday morning looking at wildlife and raising money for wildlife at the same time. Come and join us!



ENTRY FORM

The Wildlife Trust Wildlife Walk Sunday 18 September 1994

One form per person; please photocopy this form for your friends.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

_____

Post Code _____

Telephone _____

Team Entry (teams of 4 please)
Each member of the team must complete a form. Please send in all team forms in one batch.

Team name _____

I will be walking:
☐ 10 miles from Houghton Mill to Little Paxton Pits
☐ 3 miles from Buckden Marina to Little Paxton Pits

I enclose
☐ Registration fee £1 (includes cost of coach)

I would like to sponsor the Trust's staff team (10 miles)

☐ 20p/mile ☐ 50p/mile ☐ £1/mile

Disclaimer (all walkers please sign)
All participants walk at their own risk. The Wildlife Trust cannot accept responsibility for personal accident, loss, or damage to personal effects.

Signed _____
(Please ask your parent/guardian to sign if you are under 16)

Please return this form to Sue Bashford at the Trumpington office (see p. 3).

Success for midweek team

Over one thousand days' work were clocked up in 1993 by the South Beds Midweek Team. Every Tuesday and Thursday this very mixed team tackled conservation tasks at 27 sites.

A more mixed bunch would be hard to imagine. It involved young people, the retired, students, shift workers, people with learning difficulties and those doing community service.

"It's incredible to see how such a varied group of individuals can work so well together and create such a productive but relaxed and extremely enjoyable atmosphere," Carolyn Surridge, Luton & Dunstable Wildlife Project Officer told us.

If you have free time on Tuesdays and Thursdays and would like to join the team phone Carolyn on 0582 481851.

NNR status for King's Wood

The importance of King's Wood, Heath and Reach was recognised at a formal ceremony in December. Thirty-nine hectares of this ancient woodland, owned by the Trust and Bedfordshire County Council was awarded the status of National Nature Reserve.

Trust chairman Lady Huxley and county councillor Dr Angus Brewer received a plaque from English Nature council member Nicholas Woolley.

The remaining 65 hectares of Bedfordshire's largest deciduous woodland is in multiple private ownership, having been sold in one- or two-acre leisure plots in the late 1960s.

Fantastic reception for youth campaign

Youth groups across South Bedfordshire have given a huge welcome to Luton's Great Naturally Youth Campaign. Launched by a partnership of the Luton & Dunstable Wildlife Project and BT's Community Programme, the campaign aims to introduce exciting ways for young people to become involved in the natural environment.

To date over 1,500 people from over 25 youth groups have been involved in projects ranging from environmental sculptures through practical tasks to field study days.

Enthusiasm has spread beyond Luton and Dunstable to St Albans, Leighton Buzzard and Ampthill, where groups have adopted local wildlife sites.

BT's support has enabled the Wildlife Project to provide information about wildlife to attract the attention of young people. After talking to groups to find out what they wanted, the project team produced general introductory leaflets on birds, butterflies and the folklore of wetland and grassland plants. Further leaflets on walking and cycling routes in the area and about public transport to key sites should encourage further exploration.

Project Officer, Carolyn Surridge, is delighted with the response to her attempts to raise public awareness of wildlife.

"This is a fantastic start to an innovative programme to involve young people in our environment," she said. "Youth groups are really excited, since it offers a great day out, and for groups such as Guides, Scouts or Woodcraft Folk, it is a great way for them to achieve their badges and awards."

For more information, call the Luton & Dunstable Wildlife Project on 0582 481851.

New Ampthill reserve

Cut-throat Meadow is a two-hectare reserve on the edge of a brand-new housing estate on the edge of Ampthill. It consists of three features – a small mound of rough pasture with some mature trees, an adjacent strip of woodland and a pond.

The Ampthill & Flitwick local group will be holding an open day at the reserve on Sunday 22 May between 11 am and 4 pm. Everyone is welcome to visit this new reserve at a time when the meadow saxifrage should be flowering.

Ringing at Millbrook Pillinge

Last year a bird-ringing programme began at the Trust's reserve at Millbrook Pillinge. In six visits a total of 393 birds of 25 species were ringed. A staggering 106 chaffinches were trapped and ringed. The large size and paler plumage suggested that several of these were of continental origin. Phil Canning, who undertook the ringing, thinks that the reserve has the potential to contribute valuable data to the national ringing scheme. The hawthorn scrub and rough grassland surrounding Millbrook Pillinge holds large numbers of wintering finches and the proximity of Brickery Pit attracts waterbirds. Phil is investigating the construction of a duck trap here.

Digging in Dunstable

New woodland edge habitat will be created at the Trust's Dunstable Wildlife Garden thanks to a grant from Bedfordshire County Council.

Boost for urban fringe reserve

English Nature's financial support has boosted the profile of Sewell Cutting, our reserve in Dunstable. Support came as part of EN's Community Action for Wildlife Initiative. The exciting range of information produced about the reserve, its wildlife and its history includes a new reserve leaflet in several versions, including large print, Braille and illustrated with cartoons for 5–9 year-olds.

The Luton & Dunstable Wildlife Project has also launched a schools adoption scheme with Brewer's Hill and Priory Middle Schools already signing-up for field work days as well as for weekend practical tasks.

All Dunstable schools have received the Wildlife Project's teachers' pack and are being invited to use Sewell Cutting as an educational resource.

Sewell Cutting Community Group

A new site-based community group has been organised for Sewell Cutting Reserve. For more information, phone the Luton & Dunstable Wildlife Project on 0582 481851.

New wetland created at Barrington

A small lake with an area of exposed shallows for waders has been created at Barrington reserve thanks to the National Rivers Authority.

NRA machinery dug out the lake with astonishing speed from alluvial soil banks covered with nothing but cleavers, willowherb and butterbur.

Wildlife habitats were devastated by several Great Ouse River Authority drainage schemes in the 1970s. At Barrington the River Cam (or Rhee) was diverted away from the mill and through a concrete sluice-gate. Only now, 20 years late, has the compensatory offer to dig a wader scrape been put into practice, thanks to the NRA who readily joined the Trust in this venture.

Shallow open water is a rare habitat in Cambridgeshire now, which means that it will become a great asset for dragonflies, other invertebrates and amphibians.

New developments at Brampton Wood

Brampton Wood was secured as a Trust reserve thanks to the generosity of members, the public, local authorities and statutory bodies. In the 15 months since it became a reserve we have been busily improving facilities for visitors.

An old shed at the entrance to the wood has been converted into a shelter with displays about the history and wildlife of the reserve, thanks to funding from the Countryside Commission and the Huntingdonshire District Council. The work was undertaken by the Ouse Valley Project Team and CambsTEC volunteers.

The car park was rough and access to the road was dangerous. The Cambridgeshire County Council funded alterations to the entrance, moving it several metres to improve visibility. Moving the entrance meant cutting into a designated roadside nature reserve. To minimise the damage the Ouse Valley Project team and Brampton Wood volunteers cut turfs from the new entrance and relaid them in the old entrance.

Come to see the completed projects and enjoy a walk in this spectacular wood on the Brampton open day on 22 May. There will be guided walks, demonstrations and nature trails, or you could just go for a walk on your own and enjoy this beautiful reserve.

New car park for Waresley and Gransden Woods

Visitors arriving to see the magnificent displays of spring bluebells and oxlips will be able to use the new car park.

Reserve managers can now bring essential equipment on to the reserve without having to impose on the kindness of our neighbours, the Mears at Wood Farm.

The new car park and access track have been made possible by Anglian Water Services, who have funded the car park on their land near to the entrance to the wood.

OPEN WEEKEND
30 April – 1 May (11 am – 4 pm)
Waresley and Gransden Woods are open throughout this weekend. This will be a marvellous opportunity to see the bluebells and other woodland flowers.

St Neots Common in stewardship

On the edge of St Neots is a herb-rich common that is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Half flood meadow and half drier river terrace grassland, its ditches and pond brim with wildlife.

Managing St Neots Common presents problems because of the low density of livestock to maintain plant diversity and because of the regular maintenance necessary to clear the ditches, which are flooded with silt-laden river water each winter.

The Trust holds two commons rights and serves on the management committee appointed by the proprietors of the commons rights. Fortunately the common has been accepted into the Countryside Commission's Stewardship Scheme, which provides funds for management of land important for wildlife, landscape and recreation.

Ditch restoration has already begun and information will be provided so that the people of St Neots can discover more about their common and its wildlife.

Alec Cooper

Common toad.

Toads crossing

Shadowy figures waiting beside the roadside by Madingley Hall in February and March were members of the Cambridge Group. They were literally giving toads a helping hand across the road.

The toad migration begins around St Valentine's Day and reaches a peak in March. The toads' movements are dependent on the weather. They cross only on moist nights when the temperature rises above 6°C. If it reaches 10°C there may be hundreds. Sadly they cross at dusk when the roads are at their busiest.

Females mate at or near the ponds in Madingley Hall, spawn and then disperse. But the males remain in the vicinity for as long as there is a prospect of females to mate with, and this puts them at particular risk. They will wait in any wide, flat place where they have a good view of any approaching female, which often means choosing the surface of the road.

Volunteers from the Cambridge Group wait from dusk onwards and carry as many toads across as they can. To funnel the toads to convenient collection points they have erected a fence 30 cm high and 150 m long. Last year 2,500 toads were ferried safely towards their spawning grounds, but hundreds still perished. The fence should mean that this year more will have survived.

Gentle strolls

Due to be published at the end of April is a booklet describing nine gentle strolls within Cambridge's Green Belt.

The booklet was written by the Trust's Green Belt Project with the support of the Countryside Commission and Cambridgeshire County Council. Available from Wildlife Shops and the County Council.

Testing opportunity

An opportunity to test the mother-and-baby-friendliness of the Green Belt sites has come to Sharon Hearle, the Cambridge Green Belt Officer. Her son Isaac was born on 27 December. Sharon will be back at work in June, but in the meantime will be testing accessibility to sites of pushchairs and babies.

Crazy about graziers

Grazing sheep, cattle and even horses have all done their bit for conservation on our reserves. By munching their way through thick rough grass in our prize pastures, they make room for finer grasses and glorious wild flowers such as milkwort, cowslips and salad burnet.

But Cambridgeshire is now intensively arable with few remaining grasslands and even fewer graziers to make a living from them.

If you are a grazier, or you know of one, please contact one of the Trust conservation officers. We would be delighted to hear from you.

New management work at Riddy

Plans for a new programme of management for Riddy Wood near Woodwalton have been agreed with the owners. Long lost rides will be restored and a circular walk will be created within the wood.

Butterflies and other invertebrates should benefit from this work and nightingales and other birds may be encouraged to breed again.

Visit the reserve in April and see a wonderful display of bluebells. There are circular footpath routes which can take you to Gamsey, Lady's and Raveley Woods and to Upwood Meadows NNR.

Paradise regained

Alder carr, huge old willows, a marsh of fascinating flora and even a feeling of wilderness exists in the Paradise Nature Reserve, only a stone's throw from Cambridge city centre. It is on the banks of the Cam at Newnham and will soon be taking pride of place among city wildlife sites.

Thanks to the generosity of Bass and support from the City Council we have funds for a new nature trail and leaflet. Throughout the summer volunteers will be busy mowing and nettle-bashing in summer, and scrub-clearing and pollarding in winter.

Our Environment Week special event at Paradise will take place on Friday 20 May between 2 and 4 pm. There will be a work party, a picnic and walks guided by experts.

Charcoal is best for barbecues

Shortly after the turn of this century most woodland stopped. Up to then the woods had been alive with the sounds of traditional management work. Wood was needed for tools, buildings, fuel and furniture and the wood came from traditional coppicing cycles of no more than 30 years.

In its management of woodlands the Trust has started the coppicing cycle again to provide the diversity of species once found in most woodland. And this also provides piles of wood to be used.

Over the last few years charcoal production has developed. Best Burn Charcoal was set up to provide a market for wood from English woodlands. For barbecues you will not find a better source of heat. It lights with paper and is ready for cooking in about ten minutes. Used correctly it's almost as controllable as gas. It also gives the real taste of barbecues, not the odd flavour of a gas barbecue. And it's homegrown. Best Burn Charcoal is available from the Wildlife Shops.

Alistair Hobbs

Sara Chapple

Whitfield churchyard, winner of the Churchyard Conservation competition.

Churchyard Competition

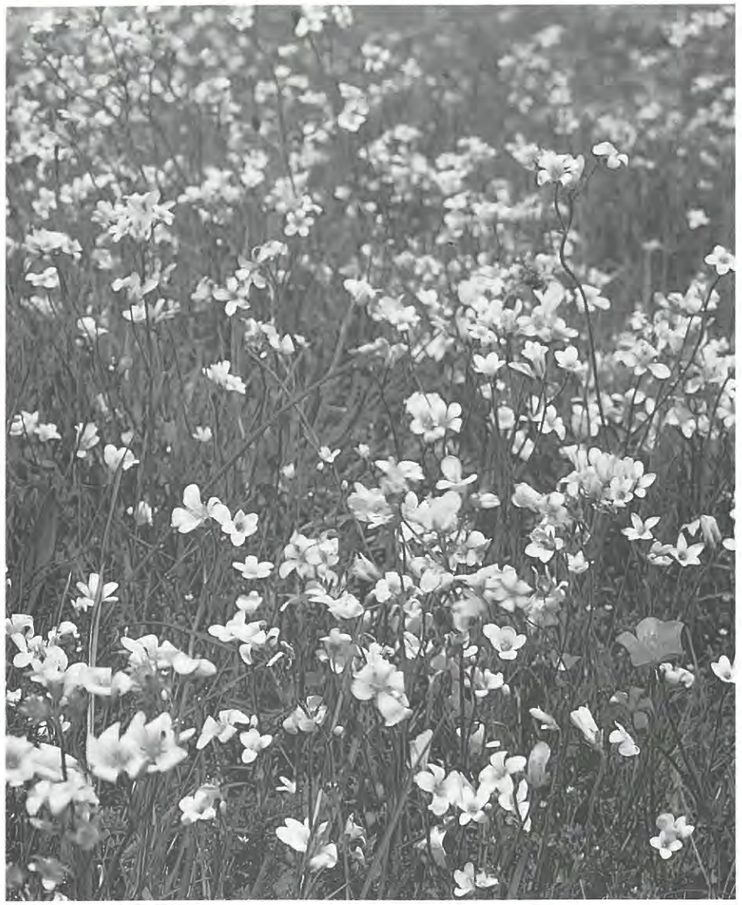
Three new entries gave the judges 11 churchyards to visit in 1993. With entries scattered from Newbottle in the south to Gretton in the north judges spent the two hectic days visiting them all, Franklyn Perring writes.

Especially encouraging was the entry of three new churchyards, which gave us the opportunity to meet members of parochial councils, which have not previously asked for guidance from the Trust. Even if not winners or runners-up first time, they may find the walk around with the judges an opportunity to pick up ideas to put them a winning position the next year – and at the same time to have more wildlife to enjoy around the church.

Whitfield entered for the first time in 1990, won in 1991 and again in the next two years. If you are ever driving south on the A43, turn left just before you reach Brackley and stop to see what Sara Chapple and her team have achieved in creating a well-ordered, but beautiful and serene surrounding for the church. Its wildlife interest is all explained in the porch.

But Whitfield will have to watch out, if they are to win again. Bulwick entered for the first time this year and immediately came second. Here too is a peaceful haven to visit by turning off the A43, going north, and enjoy the delightful nature reserve the Reverend Mervyn Wilson has masterminded.

Winner and two runners-up receive cash prizes towards the cost of the conservation effort, thanks to Calor Gas, sponsors of Northamptonshire's Best-kept Village Competition. However, we want to reward all entrants with a certificate that recognises their effort and which could be displayed in the church porch. If you (or a member of your family) would like to design a certificate, please let me know by phone (0832 274892), fax (0832 274568) or post (Franklyn Perring, Green Acre, Wood Lane, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 5TP).



Meadow saxifrage.

Barford Meadows – an unmissable opportunity

Thirty-seven hectares of meadow between Kettering and Corby on the A6004 could become the Trust's newest reserve. Barford Meadows is a hay meadow with a large population of meadow saxifrage, a rarity in Northamptonshire. Part of the area is an SSSI and typical plants here include great burnet and lady's bedstraw.

Parts of Barford Meadows have not been managed properly for years. Unless they are taken in hand their wildlife interest will deteriorate significantly and the SSSI will be irreparably damaged.

But the Trust wants to do more than save the site. We have imaginative plans for the creation of a broad-leaved woodland on 16 hectares of arable and to re-establish grassland rich in plants and insects.

This promises to be a very exciting reserve for visitors and facilities will include a cycle path.

Generous funding from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Esmée Fairbairn Charitable Trust, Northampton County Council and Kettering Borough Council have given us the bulk of the purchase price.

But £20,000 is still needed.

An appeal has been launched to ensure that this beautiful and important nature reserve can be made safe. Please send donations to the Trust's Northampton office at Lings House, Billing Lings, Northampton NN3 8BE.

Garden bird and nestbox survey

The aim of this survey was to discover how important gardens are as bird habitats, writes Cliff Christie, Pitsford reserve warden. Judging by the information gleaned from the 50 returned forms, they are important. And in winter they may be life-saving. It is also clear that the birds are important to the garden owners.

Three urban, 14 suburban and 33 rural gardens were surveyed. Twenty-one had ponds and a further 16 had bird-baths. A few lucky owners could also boast streams.

There were three aspects to the survey: recording the birds using the garden, the use of nestboxes and the plants on which the birds fed.

A total of 77 species were recorded. In addition to expected species, there were raptors in the shape of kestrels and sparrowhawks taking garden birds and one member recorded a hobby hunting hirundines over the garden.

The larger rural gardens attracted the greatest diversity of species. Both barn and tawny owls were seen in one Helpston garden, yellowhammer and skylark appeared in an Earls Barton garden, heron and kingfisher visited a garden pond in Oundle as did yellow and pied wagtail, while a stream in Weldon brought moorhen and reed bunting into the garden.

Geese flighting over to stubble fields were recorded in one ornithological Mecca in Oundle, hawfinches were seen. Passage wheatears at Wollaston and a grasshopper warbler in Lower Benefield were highlights among the birds passing through.

Only blue and great tits occupied nestboxes and there were no surprises among the species recorded nesting in gardens.

The range of food plants was extraordinary. In addition to the popular pyracantha and cotoneaster were sea campion, African marigolds and delphiniums. Rowan, hawthorn, ivy, elder, honeysuckle, holly, dog rose, apple, teasel and lavender all scored well. The gardeners who admitted their thistles and dandelions deserved their goldfinches.

Hedge pledge

Hedges are an important feature of Northamptonshire's landscape, but each year hedges still disappear. Nationally, according to the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, we lose 5,000 miles each year and we only plant 800 miles.

Today hedges are lost by neglect rather than deliberate destruction. Practical action is needed. The Northamptonshire Nature Conservation Forum, at which over 20 organisations meet and which is chaired by the Trust, has taken positive action with its Hedge Pledge.

All members of the Forum have been asked to sign a pledge to ...berate concern and practical action, to create a landscape feature of boundary hedges across the county, to encourage hedgerow maintenance and for all members to do everything they can to conserve hedges on their own land.

Already Corby Borough, Wellingborough and East Northamptonshire Councils have all tabled pledges for adoption.

Yet another Private Member's Bill has been tabled in the House of Commons. There is an element of the lottery about Private Member's Bills, and if the Government were to adopt it, we might finally see hedges protected.

Nibbled nuts in new woods

During a busy winter the Dormouse Group's Great Nut Hunt discovered two new Northamptonshire woods with dormouse-nibbled nuts in them. More boxes have been built and put up in a variety of sites, thanks to an Anglian Water Award. These will have to be checked regularly throughout the summer and early autumn.

Volunteers to help with dormouse work are needed. Phone the Northampton office on 0604 405285 or Mike Miley, the Dormouse Conservation Officer, on 0536 762712.

Bank and council sponsor people and wildlife project

Councillor Mary-Anne Sergison-Brooke of South Northamptonshire Council receives a supporters certificate from Trust conservation officer Caroline Tero. Beside them Keith Powell of Barclay's Bank is presented with a certificate from local MP Tim Boswell.

Funding had been given by the council and the bank for interpretative material and equipment for management at Boddington Meadow and equipment and a boardwalk for Byfield Pool.

Wildlife role for local authorities

New strategies for wildlife have been published by Northamptonshire County Council and Northampton Borough Council. These local authorities play an important role in conserving wildlife and have worked closely with the Trust and English Nature in completing these strategies.

The County Council plan was written by the Trust, English Nature and council staff and is already proving its value in ensuring that nature conservation is taken into account when planning decisions (especially those relating to gravel extraction) are made.

The borough strategy was based on a survey of the town, in which 50 sites were identified as important for wildlife. The Trust also wrote the text for the plan, which demonstrates how effectively the two organisations can work together.

Copies of both strategies can be bought from the Trust. Telephone 0604 405285 for details.

Otter Group needs helpers

An Otter Group is about to be launched by the Trust in Northamptonshire. If you would like to become involved, contact the Northampton office on 0604 405285.

NOTICEBOARD

Barn dance raises £508

Enterprising volunteers from the Huntingdon area raised £508 for conservation by organising a barn dance at Great Stukeley Village Hall. There were 110 enthusiasts who danced to the Cherry Hinton Band, whose drummer is Sue Magee, the Trust's membership secretary.

Aluminium cans

We are still collecting aluminium cans for recycling. Please deliver your washed, crushed aluminium cans to your nearest Trust office.

House-to-house recruitment

Last year the Trust ran a pilot membership recruitment scheme. It involved 'very soft' house-to-house recruitment by trained, sensitive and highly motivated young people who wish to help the environment.

The scheme has a proven track record with ten Wildlife Trusts across the country and can generate reliable long-term income, because those who join are asked to complete a seven-year covenant, which they pay monthly.

During the short period we have run the scheme we have raised £5,500 through membership recruitment. The Trust contributes 15% of the total value to cover all the costs.

If someone knocks on your door offering you membership in this way, please let marketing director, Moya Winter, have your views. She is anxious to have feedback, although she is encouraged by the Devon Wildlife Trust having received no single complaint in four years of operating the scheme.

Wildlife Photography Workshop

So popular was the May Photography Workshop that another is being arranged for Sunday 18 September. Tutor for the day-long workshop will again be Richard Revels.

For details contact Rosemary Brind, Bedford Museum, Castle Lane, Bedford, MK40 3XD. Telephone 0234 353323.

WATCH logo joins the family

WATCH, the junior branch of The Wildlife Trusts has a new logo which emphasises the link with Trusts. The badger's head replaces the amoeba, but the word WATCH is in the same very distinctive typeface.

To find out more about Wildlife WATCH contact Jenny Ryle at the Bedford office on 0234 364213.

WATCH group needs helpers

Malcolm Busby of Milton WATCH group would like to involve more helpers. Enthusiasm is more important than experience, and the experience gained could be very useful to people who want to work with children in the future. Malcolm can be contacted on 0223 420060 or 440196.

If you would like to help with any of our other WATCH groups, contact Jenny Ryle on 0234 364213.

JOIN THE HERON 200 CLUB

Heron 200 Club members pay £12 a year (equivalent to £1 a month) by Banker's Order. Half the money raised goes straight to Trust funds. Last year we raised enough to buy field equipment for school visits to educational reserves.

The remaining money goes as prize money. There are two draws, in January and July, when six winners were drawn by lot.

Winners in January were
V E Kent Ledger (first),
R Chrystal and R Last (second),
and Ms F J Atkinson, Mrs A Buxton and Dr J T R Sharrock.

To join the Heron 200 Club complete the form below and return to: Heron 200 Club, The Wildlife Trust, Priory Country Park, Barkers Lane, Bedford, MK41 9SH.

I/We want to raise funds for the Trust and join the **Heron 200 Club**. Please send me/us the Banker's Order form.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

_____

Postcode _____

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In 1987 the International Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine reported:
- ★ 87% decrease in heart disease
- ★ 66% less need for treatment in 17 disease categories

Discovery days

A new programme of one-day workshops, partly indoor and partly outdoor, are available for Trust members.
Cost £25 per day, including lunch (concessions £17.50).
All profits go towards reserve management.
Contact Lorna Sharrock at the Bedford office for more information or to reserve a place; tel. (0234) 364213.

Discovering ancient woodland ***Saturday 11 June*** **at Gamlingay Wood**
Our living links with ancient wildwood make a fascinating day of discovery in the company of Dr Oliver Rackham, fellow of Corpus Christi College and an international authority on ancient woodlands.

Discovering chalk grassland ***Saturday 25 June*** **at Pegsdon Hills**
Find out about the history, geology, flowers, insects and management of chalk grassland, including recreating downland from arable.

Discovering wetlands ***Sunday 14 August*** **at Wicken Fen**
Saw sedge and snipe: the past, present and future of local wetlands and Wicken fen in particular. A look at the history, wildlife and management, plus threats and opportunities.

Woodland craft skills ***Saturday 1 October*** **at Gamlingay Wood**
Introduction to ancient coppice crafts. Come and try your hand at making practical products, such as chair legs, candle sticks, rolling pins, thatching spars, besoms and gate hurdles.

DRAGONFLIES IN THE GARDEN
RECORDING FORM

Anyone with access to a garden pond (it doesn't have to be your own) can take part in the survey.

Name: _____
Address: _____
_____
_____
Age of pond (if known): _____ Approximate size (ft): _____
Pond location (Grid reference if known): _____
Are there fish in the pond? YES/NO
Species: _____

Species recorded	*Date*	*Numbers seen*	*Behaviour e.g. egg laying*
Azure damselfly			
Blue-tailed damselfly			
Common blue damselfly			
Red-eyed damselfly			
Large red damselfly			
Broad-bodied chaser			
Four-spotted chaser			
Common darter			
Ruddy darter			
Emperor dragonfly			
Southern hawker			
Migrant hawker			
Brown hawker			
Other			

Exuviae (larval skins) found on vegetation around pond? YES/NO

Please return your completed form, with any exuviae, to
The Wildlife Trust, Enterprise House, Maris Lane, Trumpington, Cambridge, CB2 2LE

Fond Memories

Our happiest memories are often of the simple things we take for granted. The sweet heady scent of wild flowers and grasses as we walk across the meadows. The sound of bird song as we rest beneath the trees. But should we take these simple things for granted? Can we say with any certainty that future generations will be able to experience these simple pleasures? Not without your help.

We need to encourage everyone to consider the countryside in their everyday lives and remember that a great deal that we love, value and consider our heritage is under threat.

One way of helping is to remember The Wildlife Trust in your will. It is a wonderfully simple way of helping to conserve the countryside and protect the endangered and common wildlife where you live. Your legacy will also ensure that our children's children are not deprived of the beauty and simple pleasures that we have enjoyed.

If you would like to receive our free information booklet '*How to make or change your Will*'
Write to:

The Wildlife Trust
Enterprise House
Maris Lane
Trumpington
Cambridge
CB2 2LE

Name _____

Address _____

_____

_____

Post Code _____