



# BRANCHLINE



## ISSUE 52

## Winter 2007

### What? Who? When? Where?

Recording natural history does not require a grasp of Latin or the ability to identify everything. The primary requirement is enthusiasm! Despite what people might think, records of common species, such as birds seen in the garden, are equally important as those of scarcer species. Species we think of as common can indicate changes in our local environment.

The Leicestershire County Council Environment and Heritage Resources Centre in Birstall is the local store of wildlife information and holds details of almost every field in Leicestershire and Rutland. Over 80% of this has come from the public; from amateur naturalists and keen enthusiasts.

Records are supplied by people of all ages and many include photos or sketches that document Leicestershire and Rutland. All of this information allows conservationists now – as well as in the future – to build a picture of wildlife. It allows trends to be noted and changes in species populations to be monitored and impacts assessed.



#### Getting started

If you want to record in your garden, on a nature reserve, or a local site, all are valuable. If you are a regular walker, you may want to record what you see when you are out. Recording wildlife can be as convenient as you like! Wildlife records do not need to be

detailed; they just need to contain the four **Ws**:

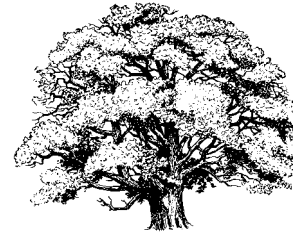
**What** was seen – the name of the species.

**Where** it was seen – a wildlife record is more valuable if it has a grid reference.

You could also include an address, postcode, description of the area, nearest village or nearby landmark.

**When** – give the date of the sighting.

**Who** – remember to put your name and address on the record so we can contact you about the sighting.



The Community Heritage Initiative run a series of surveys that help you record nature. Whether you want to record the frogs and spawn in your garden pond each year, measure and age a local tree, or make a record of a favourite field pond, there is a survey for you:

- Ancient Tree Survey
- Hedgerow Survey
- Hop, Skip & Jump Hare and Rabbit Survey
- Snakes Alive! Reptile Survey
- Spawn Spot Frog and Toad Survey
- Pondamonium Field Pond Survey
- Flowering Fields Grassland Survey
- Wooded Wonders Woodland Survey
- FishFinders Fish Survey
- Ladybird Survey Pack
- Butterfly Bounty Survey Pack

All of the CHI surveys are available to download from the website, along with background information. Alternatively, contact the team to request paper copies.



### **What is Breathing Places?**

The BBC launched their Breathing Places campaign in 2006 aiming to get 1 million people involved in nature and their local environment. Library services across the UK are working in partnership with the BBC to promote and support the campaign and be a focal point for information in the local community.

### **Who is involved locally?**

In Leicestershire, Library Services have embraced the Breathing Places theme with a year of activities aimed at encouraging everyone to enjoy and be inspired by nature and wildlife whilst raising the profile of libraries within the community.

### **What events have been run?**

The first promotion of the year was Nest Box Challenge and all 54 libraries were provided with a nest box. Library users and staff recorded bird activity around the boxes, which were put up either on the library or elsewhere within the community ie school, village hall. Families were encouraged to take an active interest in birds at a number of library events held during February half-term which coincided with National Nest Box week. Over 600 children and adults enjoyed a range of activities including talks by an RSPB volunteer, bird themed story and rhyme times for under 5s and a Brilliant Birds Library Challenge for 7 – 12 year olds. Feedback from participants was excellent – “I am inspired to try and identify different birds and put up a nest box in my garden”. Ultimately just three of our nest boxes are known to have successfully housed families – two of blue tits and one of great tits. Disappointing perhaps but many staff commented “hopefully next year”.

Throughout the year libraries have had

Breathing Places displays to raise awareness of the attractive, inspiring books they have in stock. Related activities and events to further inspire adults and children have been held, many benefiting from the support of local organisations such as Wildlife Watch, RSPB, Leicestershire Bat Group, Community Heritage Initiative, RecycleNow Home Composting, Little Rotters, Conkers, Leicester Hedgehog Rescue and others.

The National Summer Reading Challenge for 4 – 12 year olds linked with Breathing Places. The Big Wild Read encouraged children to continue reading during the summer holiday and to become more involved with nature and the environment. In Leicestershire over 10,000 children took part.

Thanks to a successful Big Lottery Breathing Places fund bid a Reading Garden is to be created on a piece of land between the Markfield Library and Mercenfeld Primary School. The garden will be designed to become a wildlife haven and the school, library and community groups will all be able to use it.

Library Services are grateful to the many organisations that have provided help, advice, support and resources to enable them to deliver activities during the past year. Libraries continue to support the BBC Breathing Places campaign and are collection points for the excellent materials the BBC makes available to support programmes such as Nature of Britain, Autumnwatch etc.

### **Who do I contact about Breathing Places?**

If you would like more information about Library Services' involvement with Breathing Places contact Val Plant, Learning Development Librarian, on 0116 267 8020 or email [vplant@leics.gov.uk](mailto:vplant@leics.gov.uk)

### **Is there a website?**

[www.leics.gov.uk/libraries/breathing\\_places](http://www.leics.gov.uk/libraries/breathing_places) and [www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces](http://www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces)

## A school heritage day

To some it may seem, at the very least, ambitious to attempt to hold the interest of a large group of primary school children for a whole day. Such ambition may be considered to extend into the realms of craziness when the programme for the day contains one subject only – heritage.

The idea stemmed from a strongly held belief that a young child is easily impressed. Although the holding capacity of the child's brain may seem small and short term, any small impression has a habit, like a sherd of ancient pottery in a ploughed field, of working its way to the surface when stirred up many years later.

With this thought in mind I approached, somewhat dubiously, the head teacher of the village school only to be swept off my feet by her enthusiasm for the idea. Further meetings to plan the event were immediately arranged, and I left wondering what I had let myself in for! To be fair I should at this point explain



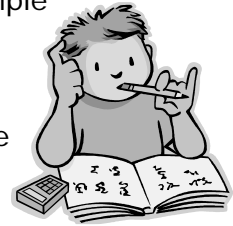
that the village school is one of the smallest in the county with an attendance of not more than fifty pupils, which would make the task more manageable than with a larger establishment. The task was to be further eased by the omission of infants less than seven years old.

The easy part was planning the day. The children would be divided into three age groups, each group in turn to take part in three activities, with each activity being led by a member of the Heritage Society and two members of school staff. Activities were to be based upon the church and churchyard, the other buildings of the village, and a walk to look at the layout of the countryside and earthworks. The fourth and final session would, in adult terms, be an open forum or a presentation by the children. The Heritage Society 'leaders' each chose their preferred subject and planned their own presentation.

The difficult part is the delivery; how to present a complex subject like heritage,

and initially describing what heritage is, to small children who have a limited ability to conceive visions of the past and ways of life completely alien to their own. Material things such as buildings or ponds, for instance, exist to be seen, but their context in a distant past needs to be carefully illustrated.

Illustration is the key word. It can be achieved with words but with young children artefacts and simple drawings are worth a million words. This is where the LCC Environment and Heritage Services "Resource Box" comes in. Based in Lutterworth it has



hundreds of useful artifacts to loan out for events such as this and we borrowed a fine model of a manor house and mock brasses for the children to practice rubbing on. Old psalter type drawings, which are simplistic but informative, are ideal for an event such as this.

On a more serious note, the day was a school activity with the school taking responsibility for all those things which need to be considered when working with small children. Although an extra curricular activity it was considered relevant to the specified curriculum. Cost was in the time spent by the Heritage Society members involved and the school staff time, plus a certain amount of photocopying done by the school.

Thankfully the weather was kind. After a brief introduction of ourselves and the subject, we set off. It didn't take long for the children's initial wariness to wear off and for them to start to ask questions. The day flew by and proved to be a rewarding success, even more so when we received favourable feedback from the school and from some parents. The school is already talking of next year's Heritage Day, which will be the real test; how much will the children have remembered?

Why not try to organise a similar event with your local school? You may enjoy it, we certainly did.

**John Lacey,  
Mowsley Heritage Warden**



## An observation.....

May I beg a few moments of your time to tell you of my new-found interest? (I almost said hobby, but that's not quite the right word.....)

It all began a few months ago when JR and I each bought a digital camera- 'So useful'- but, being the original technophobe, I quickly began to rue the day (Why did I ever buy this? etc., etc. ) In desperation, we booked into 'Digital Photography - A Short Introduction' at Holly Hayes and prepared to 'bite the bullet' and LEARN.

But No, this was not to be my 'turning on' point. During the sessions, Carolyn casually mentioned that she was in the process of preparing a programme of other, short courses, all pertinent to activities at Holly Hayes and showed us the proposed programme.

The environment was comfortable - the company was relaxed and convivial - the husband was encouraging - I signed up to 'Creating Illustrative Documents'!

Harboring self-doubt and lack of confidence, I arrived at Holly Hayes on the appointed Tuesday evening to find several others in precisely the same frame of mind. However Sam, our tutor, was most understanding and encouraging; although arming us with pencil and paper, she led us into the garden, pointed to a tree and said 'Sketch some or all of that'.

Fighting down my panic, I found a comfortable seat, drew a deep breath and began - to enjoy myself! Adjourning indoors, with a new piece of paper, we divided the sheet into four, chose an item from a vast array of HH prize exhibits (in my case a shell) and were given 20 minutes to make a detailed sketch- 'in the top left hand square please'- then six minutes ('top right')- then three minutes ('bottom left')- then



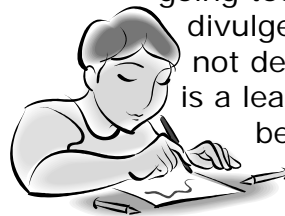
HELP! one minute... this was literally an object lesson!

Returning the following evening, we further explored our ability to sketch and draw - and I was hooked!

I returned a few weeks later for a full Saturday session, this time with Annabel and 'Botanical Illustration'.

These very short courses have fired my imagination; both Sam and Annabel promised faithfully *not* to call in the Art Police and gave helpful advice and encouragement. Without exception, everyone in the group left these sessions clutching a handful of our own work, our confidence boosted, our aspirations high - and unbounded enthusiasm.

So now I cannot stop! Sketchbooks are filling up, the search is on for more materials (watercolour and paper). Subject matter appears, magically, everywhere (I'm learning to look!) and, incredibly, I have begun a major project, in the best Holly Hayes practice. This will take all of 12 months and is not going too smoothly, so I divulge no more! But I am not deterred. Every mistake is a learning curve and has to be regarded positively!



Now, if you will excuse me, the weather is perfect, the sketchpad and pencils await and I must press on with the next stage.....

**Vine Lacey, Mowsley**

## Free Heritage Detective pack

The Parish Investigation Project pack provides an opportunity for local people to highlight valuable areas in the parish, which could lead on to different and perhaps larger community projects.

It looks at all aspects of the natural and social heritage of the community - using the parish as a 'Museum on the Doorstep'. Within a local area there is much that can be explored and the pack offers ideas under the headings of natural, archaeological, industrial, built, and geological heritage. It also offers ideas on how to set up a project. Contact the CHI for your copy.

## Holly, ivy and mistletoe

**The Holly and the Ivy  
When they are both full grown  
Of all the trees that are in wood  
The Holly bears the Crown.**

A traditional Christmas carol believed to have been written in the 18th century. The references to the holly and ivy suggest that at least part of the song was written much earlier.

Decorating the house with evergreens to symbolise enduring and renewed life has evolved from an ancient pagan custom, becoming interwoven with more recent Christian stories.

The Puritanism of the mid 17th century led to the banning of decorating houses with greenery. Thankfully the practice was revived by the Victorians.

### Holly facts

Holly can be found as a shrub in oak and beech woodlands, in hedgerows and by rocky hillside streams. Plants are raised easily from seeds dispersed by birds that eat the holly berries in the autumn. Holly comes in many varieties. The leaves are always evergreen, but some are smooth, with no sharp prickles and some have prickles growing on their prickles. A holly bush is either male or female, and only the female bears berries.

### Holly folklore

In the language of flowers holly stands for foresight and good wishes.

It is said that elves and fairies will join in Christmas celebrations if they can shelter in the holly branches. In return they protect the household inhabitants from the antics of the house goblin. It was believed that because the holly leaf is prickly, it would drive away enemies. Witches are said to detest it because it is holy, and in the dead of the year its berries are a protection from evil, red being a potent magical colour.

Mediaeval monks called it the Holy tree and this name remained up until the end of the seventeenth century. One medieval legend says that holly sprung up wherever Christ walked, another that holly berries were once yellow, but changed to red to represent Christ's blood.



### Ivy facts

There are 500 species of evergreen climbers and deciduous thorny shrubs within the ivy family. All ivy plants have white flowers, which are only produced on

the more mature shoots. Ivy only produces flowers when the branches get above their support. They often continue to flower until late in December and while they have little or no scent, they produce plenty of nectar and are a good food source for bees in late autumn.

### Ivy folklore

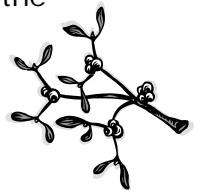
In the language of flowers it represents fidelity, friendship, love, constancy and dependence, and, like holly, is a sign of immortality.

A bush or garland of ivy was once hung outside taverns and vintners' shops, as a sign that wine could be bought there, and ivy leaf wreaths worn on the head were said to prevent hair loss after an illness. It is said that ivy growing up the side of a house protects the inhabitants from witches, but if it withers it is an omen of disaster.

### Mistletoe facts

Mistletoe is a partially parasitic, evergreen plant, which appears as a green ball in tree branches. Although it produces some of its own food, it has no roots of its own and takes minerals from its host tree.

It occurs mainly in the southern Midlands, particularly Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. Berry eating birds excrete the sticky seed of the mistletoe onto the tree bark. Its name comes from the Anglo-Saxon words "mistel" meaning dung and "tan" meaning twig – so mistletoe literally means 'dung-on-a-twig'!



### The Folklore of Mistletoe

Strong pagan association caused mistletoe to be banned from churches at Christmas and other times. This is still present in most parishes.

The custom of kissing under the mistletoe is English. Foreign visitors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were said to be very surprised by the way men and women kissed without self-consciousness. In more recent times it was said that if a girl stands under a mistletoe bough, she cannot refuse to be kissed by anyone who claims the privilege.

## Poetry in Bottesford

Until recently, Bottesford was, for me, new territory. As a Leicestershire writer I had been asked to write and perform poems about the village as part of the Poetry Pathways project. A quick google search revealed, on the Bottesford Living History websites, and the Leicestershire villages websites, tantalising stories about Shakespeare connections, witchcraft trials and a World War II Bomber Command airfield. Most interesting were the reminiscences by local people, about the corner shops, wartime experiences, school days, and growing up in the village.



Visiting the village gave me new insights. Meeting members of the local history group gave me the opportunity to identify “quirky” pieces of information I would have found difficult to find in written sources: local legends, ghost stories and personal anecdotes.

The experience of being “in the place” offered further dimensions of sensory perceptions, and emotional connections - touching the smooth marble tombs in the church, feeling the brutal roughness of the stocks and the whipping post, wondering how many generations of children had paddled in the River Devon. My interest as a writer is on human experience: politics, technology and fashion may change over centuries but human experience and emotion is universal – what did it feel like to be a woman accused of witchcraft, a World War II pilot, or a medieval peasant?

Is there a place for an imaginative

response in a study of local history or environment? I believe it can enrich our understanding. There is no substitute for detailed and accurate research, but then, taking an imaginative leap can offer new possibilities. It has been said that the role of a writer or artist is to suggest new ways of seeing things. It is easy to become familiar and accepting of things we see every day – sometimes it takes an outsider coming in to make us look, I mean *really* look at what is around us, whether it’s a medieval gargoyle, a market cross, an oak tree, or a butterfly, and to use *all* our senses.



Everyone in Bottesford made me very welcome, and I hope to continue my connections with the village. The Poetry Pathways event was a great success – perhaps other heritage and environmental groups might consider using a poet!

### Bottesford Market Cross

Stand beneath the market cross,  
Sense resonances  
Imprinted on the atmosphere,  
A Michaelmas Fair,  
Scents of cinnamon and apples,  
Red ribbons for a sweetheart,  
Sweetmeats for a child,  
A fiddler plays a jig while  
Deals are done over jugs of ale  
Servants hired, bargains made,  
And bets are laid.

Shrove Tuesday revels,  
A boisterous ball game  
Ending, some say, in tragedy,  
For a Fair Maid of Normanton  
Laid in the graveyard.

And the rattle of a plague cart,  
Rolling through deserted streets,  
Carrying corpses of the Black Death.

A witch whipped, screaming,  
Through streets echoing  
With the howling cacophony  
Of a barbaric rabble,  
A thief in the stocks, pelted  
With stones and stinking horse dung.

And under your feet feel  
Reverberations of wars,  
Heavy footsteps, knocking on a door,  
A telegram, a son dead on the  
Somme.  
The throb of a returning Lancaster,  
Dull thud of exploding bombs.

Whisper names unspoken here for  
centuries,  
Thomas Gentil, Moses Calvert,  
Emma Aennycourt, Alice Bele,

Listen as their names hang in the air.

**Sue Mackrell, August 2007**

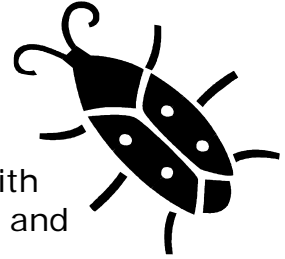
**Training Day - Introduction to  
Badger Sett Surveying  
16<sup>th</sup> Feb Holly Hayes, 10am - 4pm**

This training day will be run by the Leicestershire Badger Group and is for people who have, or would like to develop, an interest in the protection and conservation of badgers. The primary aim is to introduce participants to the skills of finding, evaluating and recording badger setts. It is then hoped that the development of such skills will lead to people helping the Badger Group with surveying in Leicestershire and Rutland in the future.

Training will involve indoor and outdoor sessions and subjects covered will include badger biology and ecology, the law relating to badgers, field signs of badgers and their setts, and how to record grid references for sett location. No previous experience is required. Booking is essential as places are limited. Please contact CHI to book.

## Creepy-Crawlies, Rocks & Place Names

Exciting opportunities are on offer for both local heritage and natural history enthusiasts with free training sessions and lectures for 2008.



Leicestershire County Council's Community Heritage Initiative (CHI) supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Rutland County Council, feature a range of natural history and heritage topics in their new 2008 programme.

You can learn how to tell a bug from a beetle, explore the rocks of

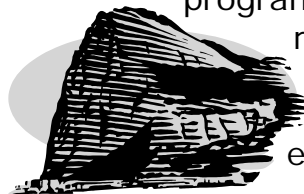


Leicestershire and Rutland, and find out where the name of the place you live came from.

The sessions take place at a range of venues around Leicestershire and Rutland and are open to members of the public free of charge. The

programme is aimed at a

range of audiences so there is something for everyone.



Pre-booking for the sessions is essential, as places are limited. For further information, or for a copy of the programme please call 0116 267 1377, email [chi@leics.gov.uk](mailto:chi@leics.gov.uk) or visit

**[www.leics.gov.uk/  
celebrating\\_wildlife](http://www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife)**



the people-powered  
innovation prize  
from NESTA

## What is the Big Green Challenge?

The Big Green Challenge from NESTA is a £1 million prize fund designed to encourage and reward people working together. We want you to develop and implement new approaches that will lead towards a 60% reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in your communities.

We are *all* affected by climate change and we are *all* part of communities - regardless of age, gender, ability, race or location. This is why we want as wide a range of people as possible taking part and following the competition.

We want people to work *together* to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, so the £1 million prize fund is only open to organisations or *groups* of people. Each group or organisation entering the competition will need to be formally constituted as not-for-profit, although you can apply in the meantime while you sort this out.

You can also be involved in the Challenge as part of your wider

community. Groups and organisations that apply will need to involve and engage their respective communities in developing solutions and in delivering their approaches.

For more information on how to apply to the Big Green Challenge please visit [www.biggreenchallenge.org.uk](http://www.biggreenchallenge.org.uk)

## Molewatch... Counting molehills across the country

The People's Trust for Endangered Species are asking for reportings of mole hill activity as part of a study into their distribution and abundance.

If you would like to participate you can record mole hill sightings on [www.molewatch.org.uk](http://www.molewatch.org.uk)

Not a lot of info is required.

You will need the Map Reference or Post Code, approx idea of the number of hills, if they were fresh soil type, etc.

It could be gardens, playing fields, reserves etc and they are interested in nil records as well. So if you HAVEN`T recently seen molehills on your reserve or whatever that is equally useful.

## ABOUT BRANCHLINE

Branchline is produced by Leicestershire County Council's Holly Hayes Environment & Heritage Resources Centre and is the newsletter for the Community Heritage Initiative (CHI), a project developed with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Rutland County Council. It aims to be a networking publication and used as an information source for Parishes, groups, and individuals interested in protecting and discovering more about the area's countryside and heritage. Mailings are free of charge as a service to the communities of Leicestershire and Rutland. If you have any articles that you would like to see in Branchline, drop us a line at Holly Hayes (details below), or e-mail them to [chi@leics.gov.uk](mailto:chi@leics.gov.uk). Articles are welcome and **the deadline for the Spring 2008 edition is February 1st 2008.**

***The articles supplied do not necessarily reflect the views of Leicestershire County Council or the CHI partners.***



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Rutland County Council

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