



BRANCHLINE

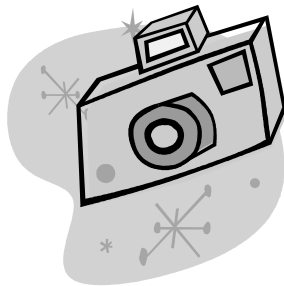


ISSUE 53

Spring 2008

New opportunities to record

The CHI is encouraging people to send in photographic records. Photography is a great way to record nature, as many people carry a camera or mobile phone with them when out and about in the countryside. The advent of digital cameras has meant that it's much easier and cheaper to snap away at interesting things we see. Photos are particularly useful when you're not sure what species you have seen, as you can send them in to the CHI or a local expert to get an identification.



Developments in mobile phone technology means that phones are often equipped with excellent cameras, and the CHI now has the facility to receive digital photos directly from your phone. This facility was used when the Wildly Wicked photography competition for young people was held last year; contributors could enter photographs into the competition by sending them from their phones. Give the team a call if you would like to know more.



People often send in photos of their sightings to the CHI, and these are displayed on the website at www.leics.gov.uk/wildlife_photos. If you have any interesting photos you would like to share, details of how to send them are on the website, or you can contact the CHI team.



Creating a Herbarium

Collections of flowering plants are essential evidence of what has been recorded in the field. They are also invaluable for teaching others, especially the next generation of botanists.

In March 2008 CHI is working with colleagues in Museums to offer training to local naturalists and societies in preparing plant specimens. We hope to enhance and update the Museum's Herbarium collections through the lodging of donations created as part of this project.

All materials such as plant presses and paper will be provided. We will also provide an information pack and advice on collecting plants in the field and demonstrations in the laboratory of pressing and preserving them, so that they can be kept safely for the future. For information contact CHI.





What is the CHI website?

The Community Heritage Initiative staff have been developing their web pages on the Leicestershire County Council website for the past four years. Downloadable publications such as community surveys and newsletters are available, as well as galleries of photos sent in by the public, guidance on the law and wider heritage issues.

What information is on there?

The website is broken down into eight sections:

Wildlife Surveys: this section includes guidance on recording natural history, wildlife law and countryside access, creative recording and photographic records, as well as a series of habitat and species surveys that can either be downloaded or completed online.

Young people: this area details the projects which CHI has carried out with young people over the course of the programme, and shows photos and comments from the young people.

Heritage Wardens: this is a developing area of resources for Heritage Wardens, which will soon include reports from parishes and frequently asked questions.

Creative Nature: the calendar of events being run as part of this project, along with reviews and examples of work produced as a result of the training.

Training: resources from previously run training sessions, including reviews, handouts and booklists. The current training programme, with availability of places, can also be found here.

Natural History Groups: an area where societies and groups can display contact information and link to their websites or have a short profile about the group.

Conservation in the County: details of how records are stored and used by Leicestershire Environmental Records Centre and information about

Biodiversity Action Plans.

Heritage Information: useful publications including Building Blocks, Greenfingers and Natural Oasis Wildlife and the Garden.

What is the website address?

www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife

Natural Inspiration



Sue Mackrell is a poet who recently worked with Bottesford Heritage Group on a poetry pathway.

Through this work, Sue got to know about the CHI programme and has been inspired to take part in our Hare and Rabbit Survey. She says "I am taking part in your Hop, Skip and Jump survey - in fact while I was teaching at Brocks Hill a hare loped past the window - cue all the kids to run to the window to see it, which was wonderful!" Hares have acted as inspiration for her creative writing. CHI is offering training in creative writing as part of the Creative Nature Programme. For more information contact the team on ☎ 0116 267 1377.

March Hare

Burbage Common, Leicestershire

Wary,
Staring translucence of amber eyes,
Antennae ears quivering,
Rangy, raw-boned body
Alert,
Inert.

Then, with the spring
Propulsion of a
Jack-in-the-box
His sinuous limbs stretch
And with whip-strong tendons
He becomes
A flamboyant acrobat,
A kick boxing,
Tricksy, dancing
Shape changer.

Sue Mackrell

Youth projects

CHI works with young people aged 7-20 years. The last year has seen projects focusing on bats, animal tracking and photography.

Animal Tracking

CHI organised an animal tracking event in partnership with Leicestershire Country Parks. Eleven members of the Castle Donington Youth Group aged between 13-16 years spent an afternoon with a Country Parks ranger learning about animal signs and tracking.

The session was 'hands on' with the young people doing a variety of activities, which focused on using their four senses and learning to identify animal tracks and signs.

This activity provided a 'different outdoor experience' for the group compared to activities such as sailing, and climbing, as they had not done anything like this before.

Going Batty in Market Harborough

In partnership with Leicestershire and Rutland Bat Group, CHI ran two sessions on bats with Market Harborough Methodist Youth Group: a talk on bats from the local bat group and a bat walk.

22 young people between the ages of 11-15 learnt about the world of bats which also included feeding an injured bat, providing a real wildlife encounter.

A bat walk at Foxton Locks saw 8 young people learn how to use bat detectors and identify the different echolocation calls of different species.

The youth worker commented: "The group had a great time and especially liked seeing the bats at the youth club. Those who took part in the bat walk enjoyed the adventure of being out together and the fact that they all got to use detectors. It was particularly good that we saw bats."

Comments from the young people:

- "The bat walk was a wicked experience. Because of both of these I am saving up for a bat detector myself so I can go anytime."
- "I really enjoyed the bat talk because we got to see bats."

Photography

CHI ran the 'Wildly Wicked' photography competition for young people between the ages of 11-20 years, attracting 33 entrants. 120 photos were submitted in total with multiple entries. The competition was judged by three young people, and a high standard of entries was received, showing how much young people value their environment and local area.

Winners received their prizes from the Chair of Leicestershire County Council at a prize giving event at County Hall in January this year.

Hind Leys Community College

Following contact from a teacher at Hind Leys Community College, a natural history photography project with a group of students aged 17-18 years was developed. The resulting pictures will be used to form a touring exhibition.

A nature walk was organised, encompassing photography at the Outwoods, Charnwood with Colin Green and a visit to the Collections Resources Centre at Barrow upon Soar. This was a practical session with Tony Fletcher and Darwyn Sumner to learn about the natural history collections and microscopy.

Both of these activities gave the twelve students a different perspective not only on the natural environment but also on their photography.

This year CHI will be sharing lessons learnt and information packs produced with local youth workers, and developing a new project with a boys' youth group in Birstall.

Sapcote Naturally

A project report by Keith Hextall of Sapcote Heritage Group

Prompted by both the CHI team and Tony Fletcher from the Barrow Collections Resources Centre, Sapcote Heritage Group decided to be amongst the first in the County to make an attempt at recording the natural environment of the Parish.

We had one member, Graham Calow, with some identification skills in respect of wild flowers, but no one with special skills relating to grasses, trees or ferns. No survey had been conducted on the flora of Sapcote Parish since 1923, and that survey had encompassed several local villages, instead of being specific to Sapcote. We decided that another survey was long overdue.

In view of the group's limited identification skills, we decided that, whilst we would record all wild flowers in the Parish, we would only record those grasses, trees and ferns where we could be fairly certain of the correct identity. We didn't feel qualified, or inclined to attempt a detailed survey, measuring out tetrads and recording every grass and vascular plant, but we did want to end up with a permanent record of species. We wanted this to be in a form that we could present to the people of the Parish so as to encourage them to become interested in their natural surroundings.

The method chosen by the group was to obtain a lightweight, robust digital camera, with a macro lens for detailed close up pictures, and to attempt to photograph all the plants included in our survey. At an early stage we also visited Tony Fletcher at Barrow, to enquire as to the best reference books, and to enlist his help on particularly difficult identification issues. The decision to use a digital camera meant that we could take numerous pictures of the same plant and select only the best. We bought an additional memory card for the camera so that we could take up to 200 pictures of high resolution during a walk of 2 or 3 hours. We also invested in a software package to enable us to

edit pictures and sharpen up focus, or crop unwanted detail.

Although most aspects of each plant were photographed to help with identification (leaves, stem sepals etc.), it was nearly always the flower that made the most pleasing picture for display. This meant that we had to revisit many of our finds to catch them during flowering time.

Sapcote is a very typical Leicestershire parish. It does not have major features that enrich its flora, but does have a stretch of the river Soar which is just a small brook in our parish, a small wooded area on the parish border with Burbage, and two disused granite quarries which have filled with water, but which are not particularly accessible for the recording of flora. Overall, we were simply amazed at the number of different species that we recorded in such an ordinary parish.

The survey started in February 2006 with a photograph of gorse, and we had not, at that stage,



decided on the length of time our survey would last. One of the first things we want to say is, that by the time we found winter aconites in March of that year, they had already shed most of their petals and were setting seed, which meant that, to get a picture of the plant in flower, the survey needed to be extended into

2007. During 2007 Graham has made an effort to improve his identification skills in relation



to trees, and more of these are now being included, but the second year has also produced quite a number of flowers that were not spotted during the first year of the survey. It is likely that 2008 will be the final year of the survey, when we will do our best to identify as many as possible of the more challenging species.

The difficulties:

What is wild and what is not? We have had to make decisions as to whether plants like snowdrops that have grown in the Church Yard for decades are truly wild. Were they planted there? If so have they become naturalised? Were they wild originally and only taken into gardens later? We have found plants like Flax and even Cannabis growing well away from populated areas, presumably introduced by birds. Again, the question of whether they should be recorded. The general rule has been that, where the plant grows away from populated areas, it has been included even if it is unlikely to persist for more than a year or two. This way future recorders will have a better record of these 'casuals' to compare with their own findings. Where unusual plants have popped up in domestic gardens, provided they were not planted or previously grown there, they have also been included on the basis that gardens are just another form of cultivated land like arable fields.

Access: We did not have a record of which farmers own which land. Where we knew a farmer well enough, we sought permission to survey all his fields, but many of the fields remain unsurveyed. It might be worth noting at this point, that by far the richest areas tended to be roadside verges, footpaths, walls etc., and, with a few notable exceptions, the fields generally were species poor.

Maps: It is not easy to get a really good quality map that shows all the fields clearly, and which also records the Parish boundary clearly and includes Grid reference numbers. All these things are very useful when you come to plot your more noteworthy finds for others to refer to in the future.

Scarcity Values: One of the early questions we asked ourselves was how do we know if a particular plant is a significant find in County terms, as obviously you would not want to plot each Dandelion and Celandine? We found that looking at Tetrad scores in the 1988 Flora of Leicestershire was about as good a guide as we could get at present. This is one area where a good number of

individual Parish Surveys would begin to produce a reference point for others.

Benefits:

- The sheer enjoyment of doing it, and the pleasure of obtaining some lovely pictures as a record of our efforts.
- A considerable increase in our own identification skills, and our knowledge of the Parish.
- A permanent record, which we can use in displays, and that will provide a reference point for the future.



Presentation:

The way we always wanted to display our work was in colour photographs. We were able to do this mainly thanks to a generous grant from Blaby District Council's Arts and Heritage section to cover the cost of gloss paper and print cartridges. Carolyn also came to the rescue when, due to the late addition of numerous species, our supplies began to run out.

The village library at Sapcote now holds the photographs for public viewing. We have also put together a PowerPoint presentation that we can take out to the village residents. Finally we have put pictures of all the species found on the Sapcote pages of Leicestershire Villages Website.

On our long rambles through the countryside, with camera in hand, a number of opportunities have presented themselves to record other forms of natural life in the Parish. Everything from Fungi to Butterflies, Ladybirds to Crayfish, and even natural scenes of beauty have been captured and will be both recorded and displayed. We found a web site, www.britishwildflowers.co.uk, which proved particularly useful when trying to confirm identifications. It is a voluntary site, and about 60 enthusiasts submit pictures of British flora so that others can use them as a guide to identification. We are pleased to say that some of the pictures from our flora survey are now included in this web site.

Spring into Action

Conservationists are inviting more people to join the successful local Season Watch project which aims to record nature's first signs that each of the new seasons has arrived. Each year volunteers send in records that are fed into the national phenology scheme run by the Woodland Trust. Data is then assessed to see if timings in natural occurrences are varying. Season Watch simply records signs of seasonal change. These signs may include the first leaves burst on trees, or bluebell that flowers in spring, the first butterfly that appears in summer or the first leaf that falls in autumn. By making a note of when these natural events occur, volunteers can keep track of how changing weather patterns effect the wildlife around us. Each year thousands of sightings are sent to the Environment and Heritage Resources Centre at Holly Hayes in Birstall and these are used in part of this national assessment of potential threats to our wildlife.

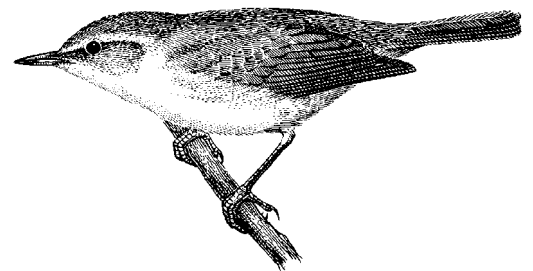
Nationally trends are being seen that spring is occurring earlier, with many plants responding to temperature rises of warmer winters. Looking back at historical data for the last two centuries it is already noted that popular indicators of spring such as flowering of hawthorn is now

occurring 10 days earlier. This has potential implications for the food chain and insects that rely on plants and



then birds etc that feed on the insects. Locally, participants are be able to record their observations using an information and recording pack developed by Leicestershire County Council. Many of these are signs from people's own back garden, but can also be recorded in the wider countryside around the area that people live. The project is open to anyone with an interest in the natural world and no previous knowledge or experience in the field is necessary. The comprehensive pack contain information about the project and what to look out for, as well as forms to make it easy for anyone to record. It is available on the internet for download and printing at www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife

The spring is a great time to be outdoors looking at our wildlife, with flowers bursting into colour, animals coming out to play, and insects beginning to emerge. Many of our summer migrants arrive – remember to look out for the first swallows. Bird song will increase in volume so your early morning sleep may be disturbed by nature's orchestra. Birds will be establishing territories and males will be looking for a mate. Some birds such as the blackbird and the robin will already be in the middle of raising their first family. Chiff-chaffs may also be heard.



Badgers will be active with many of the young emerging above ground for the first time, in about April. Adults may also be seen as they go out on nightly foraging expeditions. Watch out as you drive at dusk, as this time is one when many badger road casualties are found. This is especially seen just after the clocks go back and rush-hour coincides with their foraging.

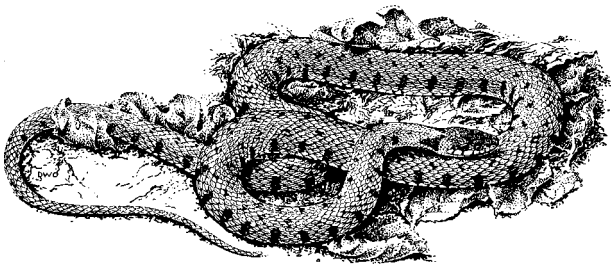
Many woodland plants flower at this time, so they can make the most of the sunshine before they are shaded out by

trees coming into full leaf. The nation's favourite flower, the bluebell will be adorning woodland floors.



Lesser celandine, marsh marigold, cowslips and primroses are some of the other flowers that will be adding a splash of colour to our countryside, later in the spring. If you spot a cuckoo flower then listen out for a cuckoo. According to folklore, this flower is so called as the flowers only open when the cuckoo begins to call.

The first reptiles will be out after hibernation – you may find adders, grass snakes and slow worms basking in the sun. The grass snake is Britain's largest snake at over a metre long. It is harmless and easily recognised by the distinctive yellow and black collar behind its head. You can send your records as part of the Community Heritage Initiative



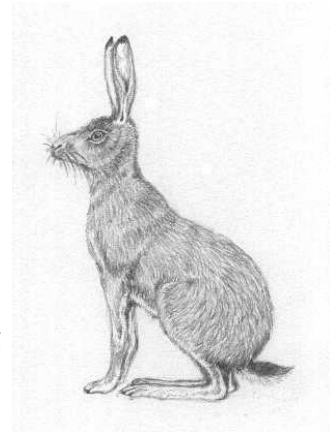
Snakes Alive survey!

Flying in gardens, along hedgerows and banks, will be some of our butterfly species. Two of the easiest to identify are; the peacock distinguished by its deep red wings and peacock markings, and the orange tip, which as the name suggests, has orange tipped wings. You can now record butterflies throughout the year with the free CHI recording pack, with colour id charts. Meanwhile down on ponds, frogspawn

will have turned into tadpoles, usually developing into frogs within 21 days. Many of the adults will now be leaving for dry land. If you have a pond, go down one night with a torch and see if you can spot our common newt – the smooth newt playing out his courtship of the female by fanning his tail. You can always record your frog and toad spawn sightings using the CHI Spawn Spot survey form. This also highlights how to identify newt eggs.

Brown hares have been with us since Roman times but their populations have been declining with current estimates at between 600,000 to 800,000 individuals. The decline in hare numbers has been attributed to intensification of agriculture which results in the loss of significant food sources, increase in the number of foxes (the hare's main predator), and shooting and coursing. Spring is an ideal time to see the fascinating courtship behaviour of these mammals.

The Community Heritage Initiative's Hop, Skip and Jump survey asks you to note the location, habitat and numbers of hares and rabbits seen. The aim of the survey is to find out the size of Leicestershire and Rutland's hare and rabbit populations, the distribution of the species in our two Counties, and the kinds of habitats they prefer.



At the Community Heritage Initiative we are keen to have records of your wildlife sightings. You can send your records to us at Holly Hayes Environment and Heritage Resources Centre, 216 Birstall Road, Birstall, Leicestershire, LE4 4DG or email chi@leics.gov.uk. If you are interested in getting involved in any of the surveys which include reptiles, butterflies and ladybirds, as well as habitats such as woodlands, pond, meadows and hedgerows, plus many more, please contact us on 0116 267 1377 or email chi@leics.gov.uk. The surveys are also available to download at www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife.

People and their Heritage

The Community Heritage Initiative free annual conference to encourage people to explore the links between communities and their heritage is on Saturday 26th April at the Rothley Centre. The day is aimed at Heritage Wardens, members of natural history or heritage groups, or anyone interested in wildlife recording, countryside and heritage studies.

A range of speakers from across the county will be exploring the theme and sessions will include lessons learnt from the Sapcote and Lubenham Heritage Groups. The day will also highlight how community wildlife data is fed into the planning process, look at collecting and natural historians and lessons learnt by CHI from projects to involve young people in natural history and also from the programme of documenting oral histories from key county naturalists.

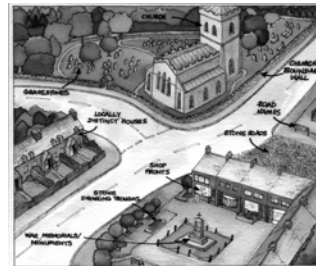
Chris Gordon from Natural England will flag recent research around one of Natural England's 4 strategic targets of "More People Enjoying, Understanding & Acting to Improve the Natural Environment, More Often" and what they have found the trends in society and current participation/activity figures in our communities are. Displays and literature will offer attendees plenty of ideas on how they can begin their own countryside and natural heritage studies.

To find out more please contact the CHI team at the address below.

BUILDING BLOCKS Getting to Grips with Geology

A free publication encouraging people to become a 'rock detective' and explore the geological heritage of Leicestershire and Rutland is being offered from Community Heritage Initiative.

This colourful booklet, entitled 'Building Blocks', celebrates and explains the diverse and distinctive role of geology in shaping the character and individuality of our built environment, and gives invaluable information on everything from rock identification, to where to see different rock types in Leicestershire and Rutland. The two counties have a wealth of different rock types from the ancient rocks of Charnwood forest to the limestone of the east, laid down when the area was under a tropical sea. For a free copy of the 'Building Blocks' booklet contact the Community Heritage Initiative (details below). Further information on the geology of Leicestershire and Rutland is available on the RIGS (Regionally Important Geological Sites) website at www.leics.gov.uk/rigs-home.



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. Articles are welcome and **the deadline for the Summer 2008 edition is April 1st 2008.**

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



Supported by
The National Lottery
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



Heritage
Lottery Fund



Rutland County Council

Community Heritage Initiative
Leicestershire County Council, Holly Hayes
216 Birstall Road, Birstall, Leicestershire, LE4 4DG
Tel: (0116) 267 1377 Email: chi@leics.gov.uk
www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife