



BRANCHLINE



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NATURAL HEROES

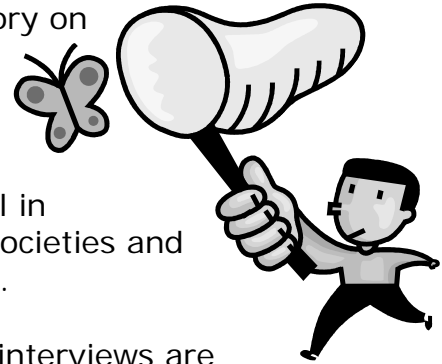
Colin Hyde from the East Midlands Oral History Archive reflects on the 2007 project...

At the beginning of 2007 the Community Heritage Initiative team and Tony Fletcher, from Museums, contacted me with the idea of making some recordings with natural historians in Leicestershire & Rutland. They wanted to collect information about the counties' collectors, the idea being that when an archive holds specimens, manuscripts, notebooks, photographs etc. it is important to know something about the people who collected these things.

We recognised that we couldn't interview everyone, so we drew up a shortlist of likely candidates and invited them to a get together at Holly Hayes. Fortunately everyone could see the value of what we were trying to do and was very cooperative. We have now interviewed just over 30 people and they have all been friendly, articulate and passionate about their subject and able to communicate that passion in the interviews. Interests varied from photographers and sound recorders through experts on animals and plants, to farmers trying to conserve



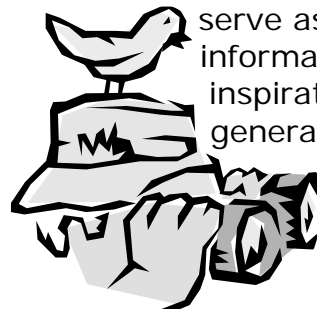
natural history on their farms, to people who have been instrumental in organising societies and associations.



Most of the interviews are around an hour long, and they aren't intended to be a thorough life history of the people we interviewed. They are simply a potted biography of their interests and careers in natural history. We have now created a collection which will be catalogued, archived and made available to future generations. The natural historians we interviewed have a love of the natural world, a wonder and curiosity about the workings of nature, a passion for education, concerns about the way humans are treating the planet and an amazing amount of dedication and enthusiasm for their work.

This project has been one of the most enjoyable I have worked on and has created a resource which will, I hope,

serve as a source of information and inspiration for future generations of natural historians across Leicestershire and Rutland.





What are the surveys?

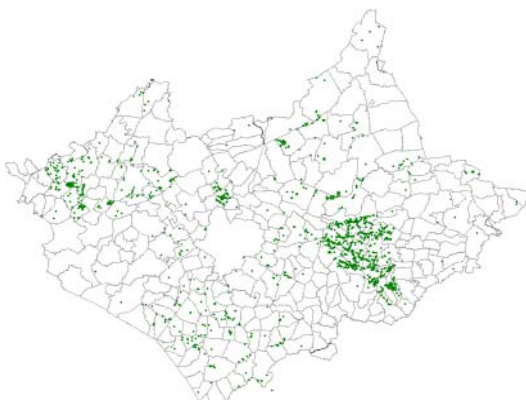
The Community Heritage Initiative runs a series of community surveys which contain all the information you need to start recording on your patch. There are habitat surveys for field ponds, ancient trees, hedgerows, meadows and woods, as well as species surveys for hares and rabbits, reptiles, butterflies, frogs and toads and ladybirds.

How many records have been received?

Since February 2004 the project has received well over 10,000 records, including around 3,000 SeasonWatch observations each year.

Which surveys have been popular?

Ancient tree survey



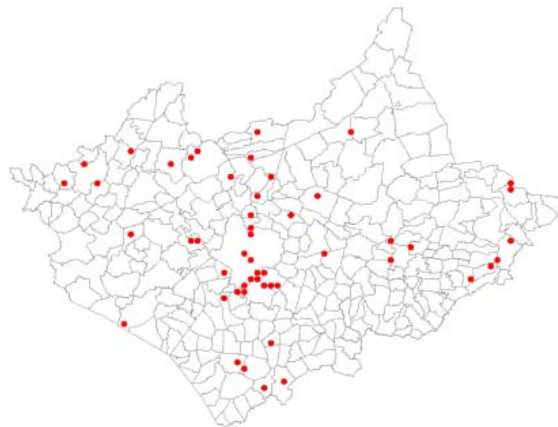
Ancient and important trees recorded in Leicestershire and Rutland 2004 - 2008

The ancient tree survey has continued to be popular throughout the project, with over 3,000 mature trees being recorded across the two counties. In some parishes, heritage wardens have tried to make a record of all important trees so that changes can be tracked in the future.

Ladybird survey

Launched in early 2004, with an accompanying display, the ladybird survey proved immediately popular, as the more common species are easy to

identify and photograph. Well over 700 ladybirds have so far been recorded.



Ladybird record locations 2004 - 2008

Results from the survey have helped to show that two relative newcomers to the two counties, the orange ladybird (*halyzia sedecimguttata*) and Adonis' ladybird (*hippodamia variegata*) are now firmly established.

If you would like to take part in the survey for 2008 please contact the CHI for a survey pack. This includes more information on ladybirds, survey forms and a full colour ID chart to make identification easier.

.....
• **Spawnsport**
• Since the survey began in 2005, 350 reports of frog and toad spawn have been received, with many recorders monitoring their ponds each season to track changes.
.....

Butterfly Bounty survey

This survey was started in 2004 as part of a project to inform more people about butterflies. It has resulted in over 3,000 butterfly sightings being reported, giving experts a much better picture of the current populations in the two counties.

In depth analysis of all the surveys will be published shortly. If you would like a copy of the report please contact us.

Also available is the "Natural Inspiration" booklet, which gives ideas and examples of the creativity that can go into recording nature.

Young people and the natural environment

We all remember playing outdoors when we were young, climbing trees, discovering animals and birds, playing games, yet today's young people have less contact with nature than at any time in the past. This is at a time when obesity levels and mental health issues amongst young people are all on the rise. An increasing body of evidence shows that contact with nature can improve concentration, and that being outdoors improves young people's social, mental and physical wellbeing.

In 2004 CHI ran a survey, '**Wild Attitudes**', to gather young people's views on wildlife and the countryside. 204 young people between the ages of 7 and 20 participated. The findings tied in with research done by other organisations such as Natural England. Young people have a strong sense of the environment as a social place, as somewhere to go to relax and have a good time with your mates as well as valuing their own special places. Many young people know about climate changes and related issues and are actively involved in campaigning on these as well as being involved in various initiatives such as recycling. However, few actually explore and experience nature. The findings from the Wild Attitudes survey has informed the work that CHI has carried out with young people over the past four years on a range of projects:

Collecting and Connecting: This project aimed to promote collecting. A group of young people became junior curators for the day and exhibited their collections at Melton Mowbray museum. Collections included skeletons and bones, semi-precious stones and freshwater shells. A pack was also developed for young people to use. The project is one that can be replicated in other museums around the county.

Wild About: A pack to encourage young people between the ages of 7 and 14 to explore the natural world on their doorstep. Full of activities and ideas to help young people record natural history and make their own field equipment, the pack has been used by teacher training colleges, the Education Centres Association and the Kent Scouting movement. Wild About can also

be downloaded from the CHI website.

Bat Project: Working with the Leicestershire and Rutland Bat Group, CHI led a project with the Market Harborough Methodist Church youth group. The group, aged 11-15, had the opportunity to learn about and feed rescued bats with the LRBG as well as going on a bat walk at Foxton Locks. Real wildlife encounters on a local level inspired the group, who have since produced a bat mosaic which will be raising awareness of bats at the local carnival in the summer.

Photography: Using creativity to inspire young people into natural history has proved a great success. The Wildly Wicked photography competition which focused on the local environment run by CHI attracted over 100 entries and produced high quality photographs taken by young people.

Lesson Learned: One of the most valuable lessons that CHI has learnt is to recognise and promote natural history in a variety of ways. Any project planned has to be original and creative. You cannot expect wildlife converts overnight, but you can give young people something to remember. Getting natural history onto the agenda of youth organisations helps promote it to young people. Working in partnerships with youth groups can help provide mentors who will encourage young people.

Ensuring that young people can input into a project and help shape it with their ideas is essential if the project is to be successful. Making sure that everyone is involved early on and that there are a variety of activities makes a project more appealing.

Finally, sessions should not be seen as just another educational opportunity. They should be all about exploring and discovering what a fascinating world nature is. Young people do care about the environment, and any natural history project should be about providing 'quality of attachment' as well as fun. By showing young people what there is out there to discover we can help give them a connection to the natural world. If they become attached to a place or a species, they will care about it and want to protect it, whether it be a tree in their garden or the bats in their neighbourhood.



Natural encounters

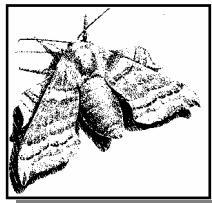
Wildlife and the natural world generate fascination in almost everyone. Encounters with wild animals and plants, from watching birds in the garden, to pond dipping for tadpoles or games with buttercups, are often some of our fondest early memories. The sounds of nature's orchestra, such as the dawn chorus or the buzz of insects around a herb-filled border, all bring the outdoors alive.

However, you do not need to go to the countryside to experience wildlife. In Britain there are millions of acres of private garden, which are increasingly important in providing mini-habitats as a sanctuary for our wildlife, while natural habitats are being lost in the wider countryside.

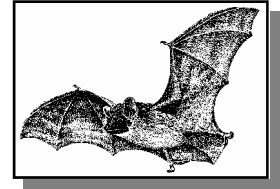
In 1983 in Leicester, a local conservationist reported that she had recorded over 1,700 species in her 700m² garden over a period of 11 years. These include 354 types of flowering plants, 21 fungi, 330 butterflies and moths, 114 flies, 50 birds and 5 mammals.

Wildlife in the Garden - Natural Neighbours

Gardens are important in providing a complex matrix of suitable mini-wildlife habitats throughout the seasons. Spring is marked by new growth and the emergence of dormant plants and animals. As the weather warms, the first flowers and shoots appear, attracting animals to feed. A bonanza of insects feed on the nectar, helping to fertilise the flowers so that fruit and seed are produced to create next year's plants. Birds sing to attract mates and are busy nest building, often using nest-boxes where provided. Robins and blackbirds can have up to 4 broods in a year, if conditions are good, and a blue tit brood can consist of 12 eggs.



In summer, when the days are long and sunny, animals and insects are most active and the garden is at its most abundant. Bats



can be seen shortly before dusk, feeding on moths attracted to lights in a garden or hunting for insects over ponds. Summer visitors, such as swallows and swifts, may be seen flying high over gardens. Night time will often reveal the snuffling sounds of a hedgehog in the garden and scent marks left by foxes indicate this mammal has visited.

In autumn, as the days grow shorter and cooler, animals get ready for the forthcoming coldness of winter by stocking up on the plentiful food in preparation for hibernation or the harsh times ahead. This is when squirrels can be seen burying nuts throughout the garden.

Providing shelter for the winter will help a wide range of animals in your garden. Dead vegetation and a pile of logs left to rot down can be host to a whole range of invertebrates. Fascinating varieties of fungi will soon start the rotting process and all of this in turn attracts frogs and newts to shelter and feed. Other plants such as mosses, ivy, etc will grow on the pile, which will be home to wood boring insects. The damp spaces beneath the logs are favourite places for many creatures including rusty coloured centipedes and shiny black millipedes.

Hedgehog boxes can be put in an undisturbed corner of the garden, or suitable

hibernation sites created with a pile of leaves and twigs. As winter progresses, berries on shrubs



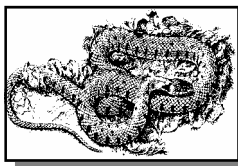
are depleted – but you may notice snowberry bushes have the most left as they are least favoured by birds!

Wild Times in the Garden

Attracting wildlife to the garden does not mean compromising on gardeners' horticultural skills or overall tidiness. Small scale projects can be harmonised

into a wider garden, bringing greater overall interest. Much can be done to attract a range of wildlife throughout the year – even if you live in the heart of a built-up area. Projects you undertake could include:

- ◇ Providing a regularly filled bird-bath for birds to bathe and drink.
- ◇ Providing nest-boxes for bats and birds to compensate for a lack of local natural sites, such as holes in old trees.
- ◇ Creating a compost heap for disposal of garden waste, which also provides a home to a wealth of creepy crawlies and worms, as well as larger, scarcer reptiles such as grass snakes and slow worms.
- ◇ Leaving a natural border of longer growing grass and piles of leaves next to boundaries to provide shelter and food for amphibians, insects, spiders and small mammals.
- ◇ Leaving lawns to grow between March and July. This can see a return of wild flowers, such as low growing birds-foot-trefoil, clover, rosette species such as plantains and sometimes treats such as cowslip and yarrow. To create a more meadow like area, wild flowers such as common knapweed, ox-eye daisy and field scabious can be planted into the grass and left to set seed.
- ◇ Leaving a hidden away corner of the garden, or an area behind the shed, for a small patch of nettles. These are good for adult butterflies such as the red admiral, small tortoiseshell, peacock and comma, which lay their eggs on plants. The hatching larvae then feed on the leaves.
- ◇ Planting butterfly-attracting and nectar rich, pink and mauve flowers in your borders, such as *Scabiosa*, *Aubretia*, *Sedums* and Michaelmas daisies.
- ◇ Planting late sources of berries and nectar for insects, such as ivy and pyracantha. Ivy is essential to the lifecycle of the holly blue butterfly that is now commonly found in



Leicestershire gardens.

- ◇ Instead of a formal conifer hedge, or fence panels, use a mixture of attractive native species for a hedgerow such as hawthorn, holly, hazel, dogwood, wild privet and blackthorn. These provide colourful leaves, flowers and berries throughout the year and are often cheaper than ornamental plants. Under-plant the new hedge with suitable shade-loving wild flowers such as sweet woodruff, violets, wild arum, wood anemone, lesser celandine, ferns and dead nettle.
- ◇ Using attractive native climbers such as honeysuckle, sweet briar or ivy to screen and cover structures whilst providing food for wildlife.



The potential for ponds

Despite the decline of ponds in the countryside, the creation of garden wildlife ponds has provided a valuable resource for frogs, toads and common newts. They are also vital breeding grounds for many insects, such as damsel and dragonflies. Ideally a wildlife friendly pond should have “shelving”, giving areas of different water depth. The different depths allows a variety of plants to be grown, such as marshland plants that just like their roots to be growing in the damp soil at the edge of the pond (for example marsh marigold) through to emergent plants which grow in deeper water such as yellow iris. In the deepest areas, truly aquatic, oxygenating plants such as curly pondweed and plants such as the water lily whose leaves float on the surface can thrive. A gently sloping side will give visiting birds and animals easy access. To help establish a new pond, add some sludge from a friend’s or neighbour’s pond and in this way introduce hundreds of pond creatures and plants. Not adding goldfish allows all the other native pond life, such as invertebrates and amphibians, to flourish.

More wildlife friendly tips and being a green gardener can be found at www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife where you can also download this article as a booklet.

PLOUGH FOR VICTORY - Farming and Wildlife in WWII

During the 1800's, British agriculture went into decline in the face of cheaper imports from the newly exploited farmlands of the British Empire. Wartime shortages increased the need for local farm produce. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the trade-routes were blockaded by enemy submarines, and Britain had to produce its own food again. With men needed for the armed forces, much of the farm work was carried out by women, who were equipped with new tractors and other machinery.

To meet the challenge of supplying the Nation's food, the Government estimated that 2 million acres of grassland had to be ploughed up and replanted with cereal crops. Arable farming would produce greater yields than livestock rearing.

During the early years of the Second World War, Leicestershire experienced a more rapid change in farming practice than probably any other county in England. The countryside was transformed from its characteristic green pasture land into today's familiar browns and golds of arable farmland.

"No weapon ever invented is more deadly than hunger; it can spike guns, destroy courage and break the will of the most resolute peoples. The finest armies in the world, courageous enough in the face of bombs and bullets can be reduced by it to helplessness and surrender."

(Ministry of Information 1945)

Agricultural Change-Farming for Victory

This sudden change in farming practice was considered quite remarkable in view of the lack of traditional arable farming skills and the shortage of tools and labour needed to carry out the work.

Since the war, arable acreage has remained high. By 2006, around 50% of Leicestershire farm land is cultivated with arable crops, compared to just 18% in 1939. Leicestershire became a county of mixed farming with many farms working a number of enterprises to avoid 'placing all the eggs in one basket'. Two main farming systems evolved:

- Arable (mainly cereals) combined with lamb or beef production
- Dairy combined with cereal growing.

By 2006, only 7% of the County's farms were defined by Defra as 'mixed'. The majority are

concentrating on one main enterprise. Leicestershire's rich dairy pastures are famous for producing stilton and red Leicester cheese, from the cattle they support. Many dairy farms also kept pigs. These were fed the whey, which was a by-product from the cheese-making carried out by many of these farms. The famous Melton pork pie developed from this practice. There are now only just over 250 dairy herds in the whole county.

Our familiar landscapes have been shaped by farming. In Leicestershire 75% of land is used for agriculture. Farms merging together and purchases of extra land have resulted in an increase in the size of many county farms. The average Leicestershire farm increased from 85 to 116 acres between the years 1939 and 1968. Today this figure is approximately 120 acres. Commercial farms are getting bigger but there is also a growing number of smallholdings, which masks the increase in commercial farm sizes and the loss of medium-sized farms. The majority of Leicestershire's agricultural land is owner-occupied: this figure currently stands at 63%.

The old medieval ridge and furrow field patterns held water in the Summer and provided dry grazing in the Winter. They enabled year round grazing, resulting in a surplus of milk, from which Leicestershire's cheese industry developed. Today the sight of yellow fields of oil-seed rape are as familiar a sight as pastures of grazing cattle.

The onset of World War II led to a drive for British self-sufficiency. Government campaigns: 'Farm for Victory' and 'Plough now for Victory' were launched and initiatives created such as: Labour Gangs, Farming Holiday Camps and the Land Army.

"The land is a vital weapon. It is in your hands. It can beat the U-boat and Bomber." (Government advertisement 1941)

The switch from pasture to arable farming caused major changes. For example, in the area of Five Langtons near Market Harborough, the five parishes contained some of Leicestershire's finest pasture land. These are due to years of expert management, producing grass of



astonishing richness. Nobody dreamt of ploughing this and as a local farmer put it : *"When you came to the Langtons you were in the land of 'goshes', fields all covered in clover and rye grass as rich as cake. We weren't farmers in this part of the world, we were graziers and grass management was our life. We could tell from the look of a field what would thrive on it - this for bullocks, that for heifers, the other for young calves - even the children and women could tell you. We used to buy in lean cattle from Ireland and Wales, strong Hereford beef bullock and so on, turn 'em out to grassland about May and sit on our behinds and watch 'em grow. Fields were grazed down through June and July, then rested while the cattle went east to winter yards. Aye, stock fattening was a gentleman's life."*

"It had taken some of us nigh on 50 years to get grass in that condition we thought the world had gone mad when they asked us to plough. We pretty near wept when it came to it".

(Ministry of Information, 1945).

The 'Land Girls'

By 1944 the agricultural labour force had increased from 607,000 to 741,000. Call up into the forces meant that male labour declined, women and girls largely made up the agricultural workforce. Many country girls chose to join the land army. Work included hand milking cows, butter churning and cheese making, picking vegetables, especially potatoes, harvesting and haymaking and killing rats. During this time, land girls witnessed a change in agriculture towards mechanisation. Other wartime agricultural changes included the use of fertilisers and chemicals, as well as a greater choice of seed variety.

Homes for Wildlife/War on Wildlife

Many species of plants and animals are dependant on traditional farming practices, and the drive to increase food production during the War led to the loss of many wildlife habitats including hedgerows, ponds and woodlands. As one farmer stated, *"There was no time to consider wildlife during the War"*.

Many species of birds, insects and mammals posed a threat to the newly sown seed and to the harvest crop. The Government declared animals such as

rabbits, deer, wood pigeons, rats, moles and cabbage white caterpillars as **'enemies of the state'** and encouraged their destruction. This had a huge impact on the food chain. For example, a drop in the number of rabbits meant that predators such as foxes starved to death.

The Plough Up Campaign changed the countryside for ever!

- Hay mowing and grazing are examples of traditional farming methods known to enhance species rich meadows. With the decline in this management, many types of wildflower and plant are lost.
 - Hedgerows are vital for the survival of many plants, birds and animals. Hedgerows not only provide food and shelter but also act as a wildlife corridor used by animals to travel unnoticed between feeding areas. Over the last fifty years the change from pasture to arable farming has resulted in the growth of field sizes and the removal of hedgerows.
 - Ponds are a common feature of pasture farming. They provide essential drinking water for stock, as well as being home to a whole host of plants and animals including dragonflies and damselflies. Before the Second World War it was not unusual for there to be a pond in every field. There has been a decline in field ponds, with the reduction in cattle farming.
 - In 1900 over 80% of Leicestershire was old grassland. We are now left with less than 5%. More than 10% of the wild flowers once present are now extinct in the county and a further 10% are threatened.
 - In Leicestershire the corncockle declined from 55 sites in the 1930's to just two in 1970.
 - 254 breeding pairs of barn owls were recorded in 1933. Numbers fell to just 10 in 1990, but are now rising.
- Fortunately, many farmers are now working to restore habitats lost over this period, with the length of hedgerow increasing since the 1990's, but the ecological value of these new habitats is poorer than those that have been lost. This was a period of great change, which led to many long lasting trends for the local landscape and a legacy that we still see today in the countryside of our county.

Butterfly Magic

Watching butterflies in the garden or seeing them in the countryside gives enjoyment and delight. However, during the last two hundred years we have lost over half of our 59 resident species of butterfly. Of those remaining many are rare or threatened. Factors such as loss of habitat and changes in land use have contributed to their decline. Butterflies are valuable indicators of the impact of environment changes in our countryside and can help us assess the effects of climate change.



Butterflies in Leicestershire

The status and distribution of many butterfly species appears to be changing fairly rapidly in Leicestershire. For example the Essex skipper, brown argus and white admiral are expanding their range probably due to climate change. Other butterflies like the dingy skipper, grizzled skipper and the wall are declining. Recent studies have shown that the loss of the dingy skipper is greater in Leicestershire and Rutland than the national average.

Butterflies are an attractive, easily observed species group so why not join in with our butterfly survey and help protect our butterfly population. Easy to use survey packs are available so everyone can contribute a record and add to our knowledge about butterflies locally.

For a free survey pack contact the Community Heritage Initiative team.

CHI receives national commendation!

The Community Heritage Initiative (CHI) was announced as runner up at a national award ceremony at London's Grosvenor House Hotel in February.



The programme was awarded "Highly Commended" at the Local Government Chronicle and Health Services Journal Sustainable Communities Awards 2008 in the DEFRA sponsored "Protecting the Natural Environment and Resources" category.

The project was commended for the way volunteers are involved in CHI's work to conserve heritage at a local level, and was the only Highly Commended award in this category. The Community Heritage Initiative was also short listed as a national finalist in the Local Government Chronicle Awards for the Community Involvement Award.

CHI is supported by Rutland County Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. It encourages people across Leicestershire and Rutland to record and celebrate their local heritage, countryside and wildlife where they live. The team run over 60 free training sessions a year and offers free information and wildlife packs to people who want to get involved. The programme also supports the acclaimed network of Parish Heritage Wardens who play a vital role in conserving local heritage where they live.

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 Autumn 2008 edition is July 1st 2008.**

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



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