



BRANCHLINE



ISSUE 44

Winter 2005

Wildlife Watching



Most people are wildlife watchers, whether they are aware of it or not!

At this time of year, we get people calling the Centre to tell us about the wealth of berries on bushes and the birds

feasting on these fruits as a sign of a harsh winter, whilst in spring time, calls are about the first sounds of the cuckoo. This is a vital connection to the countryside and involves collecting natural history observations.

Holly Hayes, as a Local Records Centre, is home to both historical and current wildlife sightings for all of Leicestershire and Rutland. Over 80% of our records come from enthusiastic natural history recorders, often referred to as amateur naturalists, but the true experts on the wildlife of our counties.

The Community Heritage Initiative, based at the Centre, has a number of recording schemes that people can join, including recording important wildlife habitats such as grasslands, woodlands, hedgerows or ponds, surveys for species such as butterflies or birds, observation projects such as seasonal change. People also send us their nature diaries, or lists of wildlife seen in the garden or on days out. All wildlife records that are sent in are welcome. Observations should include:

- A correctly identified species
- identifiable place
- definite date
- by a named person

For more details of surveys, or to order copies of leaflets, visit the CHI web site below.

Marion Vincent, Heritage Warden for Rothley reports her wildlife watching:

I am now getting out again, having been ill over the summer. The immediate project is looking into the possible industrial archaeological connection with a very large circular flower ornament in the grounds of The Grange in Rothley—a most unusual feature that needs to be recorded before the builders move in. The Archaeological Warden, Brian Verity, and myself are working on this project together.

As most of my natural history this quarter has been observations in my garden, it has been an extremely interesting time.... Very active foxes, particularly a young one which would spring up from the ground to grab the fat balls put out for blue tit food. They hang on a string from a tree and would go overnight if renewed after removal in the morning. This young fox would just ignore my presence a few feet away.

My strawberries would also disappear overnight, beds trampled down, netting pushed away. Culprit seen about 10.30 a.m. – a muntjac deer.

I had lovely views of a hummingbird hawkmoth in the garden, seen just by sitting outside watching.



My latest bit of wildlife is a badger, ploughing up the mulch for worms. First seen at 8.30 a.m. but evidence every morning of activity. Last seen at lunchtime 12:10 pm last week, completely oblivious to me standing just a short way away.

Community Heritage Initiative

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www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife



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What is the Heritage Warden network?



The Heritage Warden network is made up of volunteers who help monitor and conserve the rich heritage of Leicestershire & Rutland's countryside and landscape.

What do they do? Heritage Wardens choose projects that suit their own natural history interests and skills, and the time they have available. They might: gather information from local people about areas that are important to them; co-ordinate the mapping of different wildlife habitats and heritage features; act as a voice on heritage protection in each parish; liaise and network with various interested groups and bodies; bring a natural heritage slant to Village Appraisals or Village Design Statements; be a source of information and assist with community education in natural heritage issues.



What support do they receive? Wardens have access to training via the Natural History and Heritage Information Sessions programme; monthly newsletters

informing them of current surveys, relevant training courses and opportunities for funding; the opportunity to borrow field equipment; access to records about their parish held in the biological records centre at Holly Hayes.

How do I find out more?

Contact the Community Heritage Initiative on the details below or visit our website at www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife.

A Walk on the Wildside

Leicestershire County Council organised a guided walk around Buddon Brook Meadows in Quorn on Saturday 3rd September.



The walk started at 10 am and as usual for the group, it was somewhat overcast, but all importantly it was dry. Fingers crossed for the sun to emerge, the 30 strong group, led by Peter Gamble, headed off to the meadows which lie between Buddon Brook and Buddon Wood.



Some of the wet meadows form part of Buddon Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and others are designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). Wet meadows are increasingly rare as they are either drained to improve the land for agriculture or development, or become covered in scrub and trees. Either way the habitat is damaged, sometimes beyond repair.

These meadows have been safeguarded by the protection they are given by their status. This is also helped by an existing agreement between the landowner, English Nature and Leicestershire County Council, which assists the landowner to manage the meadows in a sensitive way and therefore preserve the rare habitat. There is currently a 5 year plan of works in progress which has a balance of grazing with tree and scrub removal. The aim of this current work is to restore the meadows to a more favourable condition similar to its state in 1984 when it was designated as a SSSI.

Despite the walk being in September there were still plants in flower,

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particularly on the drier points. Harebell, musk mallow and devils-bit scabious were all seen in the first meadow, which also contains the ground remains of a moated gate house to one of the area's medieval deer parks. Other meadows showed us water mint and creeping jenny in flower and guelder rose and blackthorn in fruit.

We got to try our taste buds on water-pepper, which in appearance is like a slender form of red leg. Initial reaction was nothing much to speak of, but then the pepper burn really hit home, quite a kick.



Speckled wood butterflies flitted by and the group got fantastic, but brief, views of a peregrine as it soared over. The sun dared to show itself when the group reached one of the more sheltered meadows, which in turn brought out the dragonflies and the group were given a great aerial feasting display by four migrant hawkers – a relative newcomer of the dragonfly family to Leicestershire.



One or two other birds were either seen, heard, or both, including great spotted woodpecker and kestrel, although Peter did demonstrate quite well that one sure way of getting a bird to stop singing is to point it out to someone else! Once again we were enthralled by Peter's knowledge of the natural world and the tranquillity of the meadows.

This was the last organised walk on the meadows this year, but there will be another two in 2006.

Foxhunting: Past, Present and Future

We are looking for volunteers to get involved with a unique heritage project initiated by Melton Carnegie Museum in Melton Mowbray.

Foxhunting: Past, Present, Future is a one year initiative which has local, regional and national significance. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, it has a number of partners including the Museum of Hunting Trust, East Midlands Oral History Archive and Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Record Office.

In November 2004, the Government implemented the Hunting with Dogs Act, which outlawed hunting foxes with hounds. Leicestershire and Rutland has traditionally been a major centre for this activity and has a history stretching back 250 years. There has also been many years of opposition to foxhunting in the county. The Act is likely to have an impact on the social, cultural, economic and natural landscape of the region, which is already becoming evident. Therefore, it is vital that we start to record these changes now.

To this end, the main purposes of the project are:

1. To record the impact of the 2004 Hunting with Dogs Act through written, photographic and oral media on:
 - the changes to the way of life for those who support and oppose hunting
 - the effect on trades and industries associated with hunting and the surrounding countryside
2. To identify and document relevant foxhunting collections in both the public and private sectors e.g. objects, photographs, documents
3. To develop an exhibition and education resources to be accessed via the internet.

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We need your help

As Heritage Wardens and people involved with the natural heritage, you are well positioned to help us record the impact that the 2004 Act may have on the natural environment e.g. biodiversity, maintenance of hedgerows and copses, populations of foxes, other mammals and insects. Whilst we recognise that some of these changes may not emerge for a number of years, it would be very helpful if you could start recording these features in the landscape and wildlife around you now. There are already Community Heritage Initiative surveys available which will be relevant, although we are looking at developing a new survey to be distributed via the Heritage Warden Network.

Tell us what you think

We are also extremely interested in recording your views on foxhunting and the 2004 Act as people who are engaged with the natural environment. Some of you may feel that it is a good thing because of your concerns about the impact it has on the habitats of other animals, or you may feel that it has a positive effect on the natural landscape. You might also be interested in helping us to gather the views of other people involved in the natural heritage and record some of these changes through photographs. We can provide you with free training to enable you to do this. This information will form part of an important archive documenting the impact of the 2004 Hunting Act and will complement existing displays and collections held by the County Museums Service.

Contact us

Time is of the essence so we would love to hear from you as soon as possible. If you want to get involved or would like more information please contact:

Carolyn Abel, Project Coordinator, Melton Carnegie Museum, Thorpe End, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. Telephone: 01664 569946, mobile: 07818 857629, email: cabel@leics.gov.uk.

You can use the CHI's Hedgerow Survey form to start recording. Contact the team on the details below to request a copy.

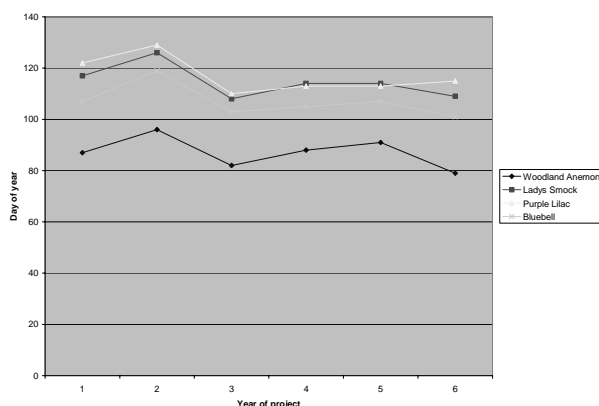
An Update on Season Watch

The Season Watch project is now in its fifth year, having been launched in spring and Autumn 2000. We now have 6 years worth of records for the spring events and 5 years of records for the autumn events.

Since the project began, it has received a lot of local media coverage. The national media has also given a lot of coverage to the subjects of phenology and climate change

We have recently carried out some analysis of the results, and it now becoming possible to see trends occurring in the timing of events. For each event, a mean date has been calculated using all of the dates sent in by recorders. This mean date is given as the 'day in year' so January the 1st is the 1st day in the year and February the 1st is the 32nd day in the year. Here are some of the things we have found...

Plants:



Many of the plants recorded appeared earlier in 2005 than in the first year of recording in 2000. The graph shows when the first flowers were seen of wood anemone, lady's smock, purple lilac and snowdrop. You can see that all four appeared much earlier in 2005 than in 2004.



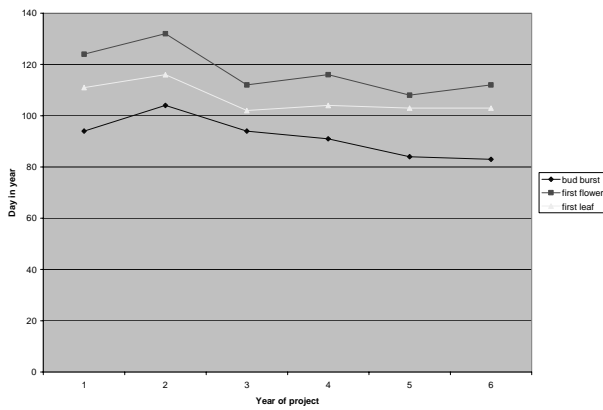
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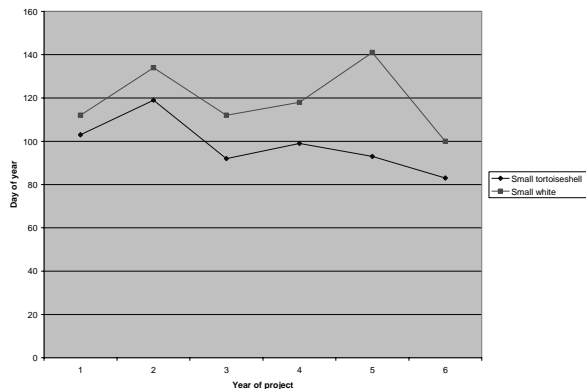


Trees:



This graph for first bud, first leaf and first flower of sycamore in spring show the same trend as the plants. You can see that they all occurred earlier in 2005 than in 2000. You can also see from looking at both graphs that the events in 2001 occurred significantly later than in 2000. This reflects the colder spring of 2001.

Butterflies:

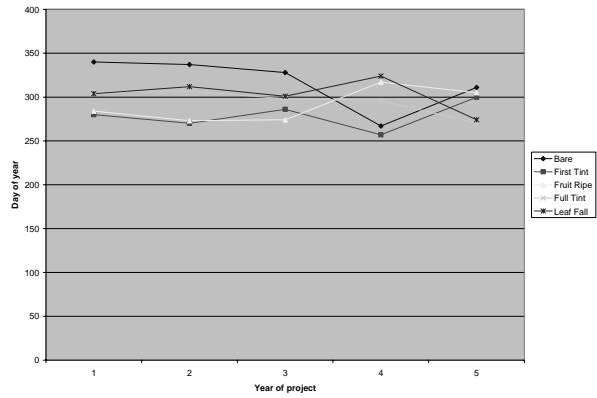


The graph shows the first appearance of the small tortoiseshell and small white butterfly. Both occurred earlier in 2005 than 2000 and, as with the trees and plants, they were later in 2001 than 2000.

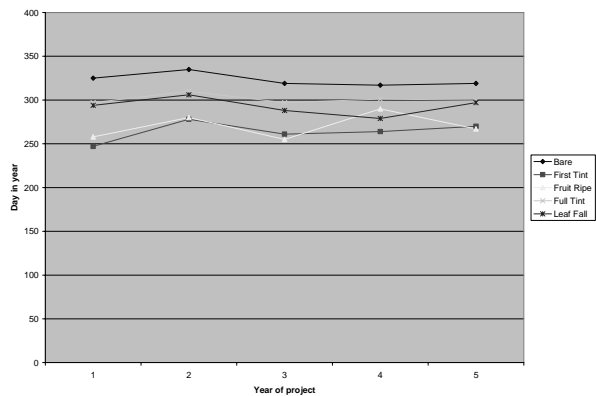
Trees in autumn:

These graphs show the timing of events

in autumn for oak and beech trees. You can see that there is no real trend forming yet and although there are some fluctuations, most events happened at about the same time in 2004 as in 2000 – we'll have to wait and see what happens this year!



Oak



Beech

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in the project and has sent records in to be added to the database. The aim of the project is to identify changes in the timing of seasonal events over the years resulting from changes in the timing of the seasons. It is really important that you keep sending in records so we look forward to hearing from you soon.



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The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan

In June 1992 the UK government signed the Convention on Biological Diversity at the 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro. As a result it was committed to conserving biodiversity – the 'variety of life' - by protecting and restoring wildlife and wild places. One direct result was the production of a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP), which set out priority species, and habitats for conservation at the national scale. In 1996 an audit of Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity was published which enabled the most threatened habitats and species in the two counties to be identified. A working group led by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust (LRWT) then produced the local biodiversity action plan. The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan (LLRBAP) was published in 1998. Its purpose was to identify threatened species and habitats of local conservation importance in Leicestershire and Rutland, and to tie these in with national priorities. In 2005 the LLRBAP was revised to take into account changes since the production of the original plan and to make the targets easier to measure. Both the original document and the revised plans can be seen on the LRWT website at www.lrwt.org.uk/bap.

The heart of the LBAP is the habitat and species plans. The plans cover 18 different habitats (Box 1) of importance for nature conservation in the two counties and 15 threatened species (Box 2). The habitats are representative of the wide range of types of countryside found in Leicestershire. Although some habitats such as hedgerows, roadside verges, and broadleaved woodland are probably familiar to the majority of people, others such as heath-grassland, mesotrophic (nutrient poor) lakes, and neutral grassland may be less so. However heath-grassland will be familiar to anyone who has visited Bradgate Park or Beacon Hill Country Park; while Blackbrook, Cropston and Swithland Reservoirs are examples of mesotrophic lakes. Neutral grassland is found in species rich 'wild flower' meadows such as Loughborough Big Meadow, in Leicestershire, and Merry's Meadows in

Rutland. Other examples are given in Box 1. Although many species have suffered severe declines in numbers over the past 30 years only a small proportion are represented by

Box 1

Box 1	
Habitat Action Plan	Local examples
Heath-grassland	Bradgate Park, Beacon Hill Country Park
Hedgerows	
Mature trees	
Calcareous grassland	Bloody Oaks and Ketton Quarries
Neutral grassland	Loughborough Big Meadow, Merry's Meadows
Field margins	Cossington Meadows
Floodplain wetland	
Reedbed	Rutland Water
Mesotrophic lakes	Blackbrook, Cropston, Swithland Reservoirs
Fast-flowing streams	River Linn
Sphagnum ponds	Examples in Charnwood Lodge NR
Springs and flushes	Marshes
Eutrophic standing water	Field ponds, canals
Rocks and built structures	Churchyard gravestones, old bridges
Wet woodland	Swithland Reservoir inflow
Broadleaved woodland	Priors Coppice
Roadside verges	
Lowland wood-pasture and parkland	Bradgate Park

plans in the LBAP. These were selected as being 'flagship' species, well recognised by many people or because they are representative of important groups of species, or because they occupy habitats not covered by the habitat plans.

Since 1998 a large amount of conservation effort has been directed at LBAP species and habitats. There have been some notable successes. For example large areas of floodplain wetland have been created from old gravel workings in the Soar valley, including the new LRWT reserves at

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Cossington and Wanlip Meadows. The LBAP has also stimulated the restoration of large areas of heath-grassland threatened by bracken and scrub encroachment. Examples of this work can be seen at Beacon Hill Country Park and Charnwood Lodge nature reserve. Much restoration work has been

Box 2	
Species	Typical location
Otter	River Welland
Dormouse	Pickworth Great Wood
Water vole	North Brook, Empingham
Bats	Old buildings, mature trees
Barn owl	Old buildings, nest boxes
Redstart	No longer breeds in Leicestershire and Rutland
Nightingale	Rutland Water, Hambleton Wood
Sand martin	Rutland Water, Watermead Contry Park
Black Hairstreak	Luffenham Heath golf course
Dingy and Grizzled Skipper	Ketton Quarry
White-clawed crayfish	River Eye, River Linn
Black poplar	Barlestone
Violet helleborine	Great Merrible and Cloud Woods
Wood Vetch	Tugby Wood. Clipsham Quarry
Purple small-reed	Pickworth and Stretton woods

carried out on calcareous grassland sites such as the former limestone quarries in Rutland, at Clipsham and Bloody Oaks.

However it is not all good news. Neutral grasslands ('wild flower' meadows) continue to decline, particularly at sites with no statutory protection, as lack of grazing or hay cutting combined with the effects of herbicides and excess fertiliser usage continue to reduce the diversity of the plant species. Canals are covered by the eutrophic (nutrient rich) standing water plan. They are important sites for a wide range of aquatic plants and animals. Many of these species

are still disappearing from these sites as a result of increased boating activities and inappropriate management.

Of the species in the LBAP, a number are recovering. Good examples are sandmartin and barn owl, both of which have been helped by the provision of artificial nesting sites (sandmartin walls and owl boxes). Otters have also re-colonised the whole Welland catchment and are moving into the Soar area. They have benefited from cleaner water and an end to persecution.



The LBAP is not just concerned with special sites such as SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) but also covers the wider countryside. Wildlife Sites (SINCs) are an important component of the LBAP since many of these sites are BAP habitats. They form important links between larger areas of habitat in an increasing hostile intensively managed landscape. To complement the work of the LERC (Leicestershire Environmental Records Centre) LRWT has a Wildlife Site project linked to the BAP. We survey potential sites for landowners, provide management advice and produce a newsletter.

There are a number of ways where heritage wardens and members of the public can help further the aims of the LBAP. They can identify and monitor Wildlife Sites in their area. They can carry out surveys of LBAP habitats such as hedgerows, mature trees, roadside verges, as well as recording the presence of LBAP species in their area. They can also volunteer to carry out practical management tasks on important sites, for instance by joining the LRWT conservation volunteers (contact Nathalie Cossa at LRWT phone 0116 2728863; mobile 07749 416094; e-mail ncossa@lrwt.org.uk).

If you are interested in finding out more on the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan please contact Andy Lear, LRWT, Brocks Hill Environment centre, Washbrook Lane, Oadby, Leicester, LE2 5JJ (phone: 0116 2728856; mobile 07740 487093; e-mail alear@lrwt.org.uk).



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Weather records

The talk about phenology on 31st October reminded me that parish records are a fruitful source of information about the weather of earlier years. The following observations nestle among the marriages, baptisms and burials of the sleeping forefathers of Prestwold.

"This year a great flood" wrote William Ward when he had finished entering his last baptism of 1588. And, after recording the burial of Isabelle Grantham of Hoton in 1615, "This year a great frost lasted from 20th January up to 13th March with a lot of snow especially between the end of February and 5th March. In our community the peas and beans were not planted in the earth's furrows until March 26th and 27th".



Between the baptisms and marriages of 1624 we find that the harvest was gathered and "corn of all types was stacked up in barns and heaps on the eve of the festival of St Bartholomew (24th August)" and the note "great heat and little rain". Four years later the harvest did not begin until the first of

September and lasted until 16th October and on November 5th of that year there was a fearsome wind. "Ye next morning the sun at his rising appeared red as blood".

Other local registers which contain references to the weather are Loughborough, Kegworth, Shepshed, Ketton, Thurmaston, Broughton Astley and Little Bowden; there may be many more.

Joan Shaw

Burton Plantation and Burton Village Fete - June 19th

Following on from the purchase of the woodland for the village in 2004, we finally had our official opening on 1st May 2005. Over that weekend I took in excess of a 100 photographs in and around the woodland. From these I chose 20 that I thought might make saleable cards. Each photograph was numbered and mounted on card. On the day of the fete, everyone who visited the Woodland Management Committee stand was asked to choose their favourite 3 photographs. A note was made of the choices and the top 3 are then to be printed as blank cards. The intention is to sell them around the village to raise funds for any future woodland activities.

Paul Sutton

Heritage Warden, Burton, Cotes & Prestwold Parish

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 Spring 2006 Edition is February 1st 2006.**

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



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