



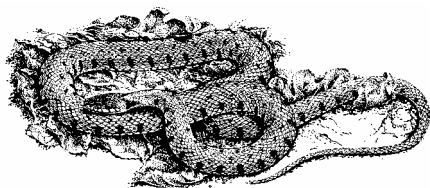
BRANCHLINE


ISSUE 46
Summer 2006

Snakes Alive!

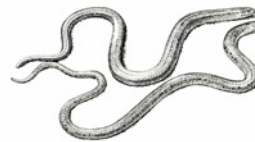
Over the last five years, the "Snakes Alive" survey has added enormously to our knowledge of reptiles in Leicestershire and Rutland. They may be few in number – just two snakes and two lizards – but they are a source of fascination for many people, who have helped to clarify their distribution in the two counties.

Grass snakes are much the commonest reptile in our area. A species which inhabits wetlands, feeding principally on amphibians and fish, the distribution map shows grass snakes to be found along the river valleys (especially the Wreake), in the canals (Ashby Canal and the Grand Union are obvious on the map) and around Rutland Water.



In sharp contrast, our other snake, the adder, is the rarest reptile in the two counties. There only appear to be three established populations: around the Bradgate Park area, at Ketton Quarry in the east of Rutland, and near Launde Abbey – this last record only came to light as a result of "Snakes Alive". Of the two lizards, the common or viviparous lizard appears to be the

most widespread, occurring more frequently than might have been guessed at previously. Its strongholds are the heaths and dry grasslands of Charnwood Forest and east Rutland, but there are isolated records elsewhere.



The slow-worm, the legless lizard which looks like a snake, also has a concentration of records in

Charnwood, with other odd records scattered around the two counties. Surprisingly, there have been no records of slow-worms from Leicester; this is generally an urban species, often found in gardens and allotments, and it may well be under-recorded in our area.

So, apart from the grass snake, reptiles are rather thinly distributed in Leicestershire and Rutland, but "Snakes Alive" has helped to pinpoint the critical areas for them. Reptiles are a warmth-loving group of animals; it may be one group for which global warming actually brings benefits. It is important to continue looking for reptiles in the future, to assess whether their distribution is changing with the climate. Forms are available free from the address below, or can be downloaded from the website.

Community Heritage Initiative

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



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

**Rutland
County
Council**





That's what Maisy Robson calls it. Maisy visits the garden with her dad mainly to see the frogs and

flowers, and as her dad says "In the old part of Loughborough the houses don't have much in the way of gardens."

He's quite right. The majority of houses in the area are terraced, built well over a century ago to accommodate the growing numbers of workers attracted to the thriving industries of the town. Little consideration in those days for leisure and past-times.



So, what is this "Oasis" in the middle of Loughborough?

It is The Rectory Wildlife Garden, situated next to the Parish Church and Fearon Hall. The land was originally part of the rectors' garden but was kindly given over to Rectory Wildlife Gardeners to help enhance the area for locals and visitors alike. We are a small group of volunteers who endeavour to maintain the garden as a place of peace and quiet where anyone can come and enjoy nature. Originally, the garden was designed, along with some professional guidance, by local schoolchildren.



Although the garden isn't very big, a pocket garden, it has been developed with a variety of habitats. There is a pond, beloved by children of all ages

because of the frogs. A shady area under and around a horse chestnut that as I write is just starting to display a wonderful carpet of snowdrops, which will be followed by crocus and bluebells.



Alongside one of the paths on the left as you come through the gate is a recently laid hedge of mixed species and on the opposite side a mature Sycamore which in season stands in a sea of cow parsley and grasses. At the bottom is the "Attractants" area, south facing and a haven for bees and butterflies. There is an interesting herb bed here as well but more of that later. As you follow the path round the sycamore you bear left with a riot of brambles against the Fearon Hall boundary wall along with hop, woodbine, elder and dog rose and as you stroll up here the pond is on your right along with the wetland area. Ahead of you is the boundary with the Parish Church, which used to be old tombstones but has recently been replaced by iron railings. It is the first time people walking through the church grounds will have seen into the garden and won't they be surprised with the riot of colour this spring that will greet their eyes. That's a brief guide to our garden but back to the herb bed. Initially there were three different herb beds but lack of volunteer time meant that they were not managed and species disappeared and others were rampant, but then.....

As you come up to the garden off Steeple Row you pass the Old Rectory Manor Museum and in 2005 they were planning an exhibition of "The History

Community Heritage Initiative

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



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund



of Medicine in Loughborough". Wouldn't it be a good idea that in conjunction with the exhibition, we could have a bed of medicinal herbs?

This is when we approached Better Community Awards who kindly awarded us a grant so that we were able to replace the old beds with one dedicated to medicinal use. As you no doubt know, a lot of the herbs are also culinary and attract insects, so it is a winner three times over. The new bed is made of old lock gates, acquired from British Waterways and one day between Christmas and New Year 2005 we manhandled some twenty hefty baulks of timber into place and filled the bed and eventually planted up. A few weeks later Charnwood Wildlife Volunteers kindly joined us and all the paths were re-laid so that access was easier for all users.

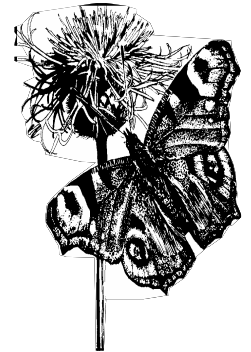
A new seat was commissioned and was beautifully carved, by Josh Burrell, from a piece of oak from the Outwoods and set in position on wonderfully wrought legs next to the information board by the herb bed. Along with other funding we were able to replace our large roadside signs so as to make it easier to find us in this conservation area of Loughborough.



We have also been able to buy more plants and seeds to enhance the diversity of the garden.

During the summer we had the local Scout group join us and help with some maintenance work, which saved us older ones some effort and one of their leaders just happens to be the man who dug out the pond (with his digger) some 8 years previous.

We are open every day so if you are visiting Loughborough and want to sit and enjoy a few minutes away from the hurly burly or the shopping call in. And when you do, just take a look at the seat you are sitting on, just inside the gate or under the bay tree and appreciate the craftsmanship of Graham Burrell, one of the founder members of the group, who made them along with the gate.



Oh, by the way, if you visit in late August/ early September, the mulberry fruit hanging above your head as you come through the gate is for " Garden Residents Only"!

Living Locals!

Grants available for village pubs!

A new grant and advice service called 'Living Locals' has been established by the Leicestershire Rural Partnership to encourage the development of local pubs as wider community facilities.

Village pubs are an important focal point for many communities- an informal atmosphere where people can relax and socialise. They can also provide extra support to their communities, by providing other services; Youth clubs, meetings rooms, internet access, dry cleaning and even Post Offices have been based in village pubs.

Any kind of project will be considered, providing it benefits the local community; how about a performing arts room, or even a museum, in your local pub?

By hosting extra services, everyone benefits: Local people get access to facilities they need and the pub can increase the number of people visiting

Community Heritage Initiative

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



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund



and making use of a building that is already at the heart of the local community.

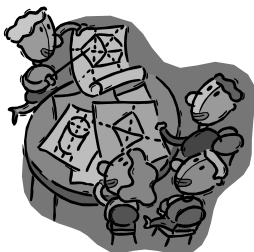
Living Locals is designed to encourage both landlords and local residents in



Leicestershire to start new community facilities, based in the local pub. Any village with a population of less than 5,000 can qualify for a grant of up to £5,000 for the new project.

Over 20 advisors from the public and private sector are available to provide guidance on setting up a wide range of projects - so don't worry if you feel you're venturing into uncharted territory! The advice service is also available to pubs that aren't applying to the grant scheme.

In addition, the LRP is working with local authorities to consider the long term benefits to the community provided by rural pubs. Local authorities are being encouraged to write clauses in their



planning rules that would make it more difficult to change a rural pub into a residential property, thereby reducing the risk of such a facility being lost to the community forever.

Application forms for the grant scheme are short and simple, and the grant assessment panel will normally make an acceptance decision within a month of receiving a complete application.

For more information on the grant, advice service and the scheme in general, please contact: 0116 2658098, or email livinglocals@leics.gov.uk

Ancient Tree Survey

Holly Hayes has been receiving records of community ancient tree surveys since the 1990s. In the last two years the Community Heritage Initiative (CHI) has received over 300 records of ancient trees around Leicestershire and Rutland.



Location of records

The map shows the location of records received to date. It is clear that some areas of the two districts are well recorded while others are under recorded.

What is an old tree?

Different species of trees vary in the numbers of years that they live, so a definitive age cannot be used to term a tree old. For example birch trees mature very quickly, so a birch tree that is 100 would be old, while a willow of the same age would be very old.

Similarly oak trees take several hundred years to mature so at 200 years old would still be maturing. Yet beech trees are relatively short lived so at 200 years would be mature.

Features of mature trees

Common features of mature trees include hollows, wounds, visible fungi and dead wood, and recorders were asked to note these on the CHI survey



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

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

**Rutland
County
Council**



forms. The girth of the tree was also recorded as generally a tree with a very large girth for that particular species will indicate it is an ancient tree, although the size of a tree's girth can be affected by growing conditions. A tree that has a girth of no less than 12 feet (3.77 metres) 1.3m above root level is regarded as an ancient tree.

Results

Old parkland and hedgerows were the commonest landscapes where mature trees were recorded. This is not surprising given the fact that Leicestershire has remnants of medieval parkland and the role of hedgerows as parish boundaries and field markers. Less common landscapes included church yards, cemeteries and private gardens.

The most frequent species recorded was oak with the oldest oaks found as stumps aged 272 and 256 in Edmundthorpe and Rothley. Ash was the next commonest species with the oldest 204 recorded in old parkland in Whitwell. Few species of willow were recorded but of those one was found to be 284 years old.



The oldest tree to date in the CHI survey from the last two years is a yew tree in Whitwell which is 720 years old and had many of the features of an old tree such as a split trunk and wounds. Although a high percentage of the trees in the survey could not be regarded as ancient, they are still of interest due to their aesthetic and cultural value as well as their value to wildlife.

Mature trees and wildlife

Mature trees are important for wildlife and generally the older the tree the better. As they become older and become hollow, particular habitats for wildlife are provided such as decaying wood, hollows, loose bark, sap runs and rot holes. For example tree wounds provide sap runs and fluxes for invertebrates. Many of our nationally rare species depend on ancient trees for food and shelter.

In Leicestershire and Rutland ancient trees are prioritised as a target wildlife habitat in the local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

They provide habitat for seven species of bat including daubenton's and whiskered. Birds such as the redstart and barn owl (two species included in the BAP) use hollow trees as nest sites. Mature trees also support a wide range of

invertebrates and over 75 species of beetle of national importance



have been recorded living in mature trees in Leicestershire and Rutland. (www.lrwt.org.uk) Many locally rare species of lichens have also been recorded.

Despite the fact that some mature trees in the survey were dead they still continue to be valuable for wildlife due to their slow rate of decay.

Looking after mature trees

Many ancient trees have been lost as a result of over management. As Britain has the highest abundance of ancient trees in Western Europe it is important that we look after them. The traditional method of management is



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

Community Heritage Initiative

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

Rutland
County
Council



pollarding but some trees have in the past been over-pollarded. In terms of managing for health and safety, consider removing the limbs of the tree only rather than felling the whole tree. If possible leave dead wood where it falls. Young trees should also be planted near mature trees to ensure future mature trees for future generations. Careful pollarding of these trees will also extend their lives. If you have a mature tree in your parish and are unsure of how it should be managed, seek advice from an organisation such as the Wildlife Trust.



Hunting the oldest tree

We can help look after ancient trees in Leicestershire and Rutland by knowing where they are, their condition and how important they are historically, visually and ecologically. We still need to continue to receive ancient tree records in order to map the distribution of ancient trees in Leicestershire and Rutland and to safeguard this rare wildlife habitat. To date the oldest tree that has been found is 1000 years old, is there one older in your parish?

Ancient tree survey forms for 2006 are now available from CHI or can be downloaded at www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife

For further information on ancient trees go to www.woodland-trust/org.uk/

Owston Churchyard Survey

**By Roderick Cave
Somerby Heritage Warden**

St Andrew's church was part of a former Augustinian Priory, and shows signs of its former grandeur, although much of the stone from the Priory



has gone into the fabric of the houses and farm buildings around. The large churchyard, which overlooks the area where the Priory's fishponds were, appears to have almost all the gravestones in their original positions. Unusually, the grass in the churchyard is still kept trim by folding sheep into the churchyard, something I have otherwise noticed locally only at Teigh.

As it was locked, I did not check in the church, nor (by oversight) did I take count of two inscriptions which are up on the outer wall of the church. Recent (post WW2) tombs and gravestones were ignored. Altogether I counted 176 older headstones or tombs of which 92 (a large proportion) were in freestone, and not otherwise counted. (The relatively high proportion perhaps suggests that Owston was a relatively prosperous district).

Of the slate headstones, 45 were unsigned, or the mason's signature was



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

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

**Rutland
County
Council**



buried or could not be read, and this number included some attractive earlier stones from the late 18th century. There was no evidence of stones with letters in relief, as sometimes found in early stones e.g. Hickling. Undoubtedly, because of particular borders used or other stylistic features, one can say that some of the unidentified stones from the 1830s onwards were by the same masons whose signatures were recorded.

The village is quite 'remote' from main roads and with canals etc. some distance away. One would expect most stones to be cut by masons close to Owston. This is so, but the signed stones include some from quite far away (Bingham, Burton Overy, Dalby [I suspect Old Dalby] and Leicester). The names on these often suggest a family connection between the persons buried and the mason who cut the inscriptions, e.g. Riley of Leicester, and Bonshor of Rearsby – probably detailed research would show there was *always* such a connection. The domination of the Kitchen dynasty is as to be expected in a village so close to Somerby.

The signed stones include:

[Bingham] Oakes 1854
[Burton Overy] J. Butteris 1855
[Dalby] J. Edenborough 1804
[Leicester] Priestnal 1842, 43, 44/46, 47, 49 total 5
F. Riley 1789, 94, 1809/17, 12, 35
[is he a connection of
[Melton Mowbray] Weaver 1870
[Rearsby?] Bonshor 1906
[Somerby] Kitchen 1827/40, 30, 33, 33/48, 35, 37, 40, 42/44, 45, 50, 51, 52, 52, 53/65, 54, 54, 79, 88, total 19
Hayes '1808'/53
G. Hayes 1851
J. Hayes 1850
[unidentified] I. Lewin 1825

Points of interest:

- Examination of the slates' backs showed some from Leicester as early as about 1812 which were smooth, but some rough backs occurred on Kitchen's stones of as late as 1845 and 1850 by which time many were smooth {Query whether some quarries were still supplying rough slates late, or whether the late roughbacks came from a stock held by the masons?}
- Two very small stones to members of the Dickman family are on plots closer to larger Dickman memorials – presumably these were of their children who died young.
- Several of the stones I was unable to photograph satisfactorily would be well worth taking rubbings from! Some calligraphic cherubs or angels on a stone to the right of the large chestnut are particularly attractive. Are they different from the calligraphic cherubs noted on tombs at Asfordby and Burton Lazars? Or did the masons all copy these designs from a single specimen?



November 2005



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

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

**Rutland
County
Council**



Love the environment? Get active

The latest ENABLE publication – a Community Action Pack has been produced to encourage people to get active and make a difference to the environment in their local community. The pack is a guide aimed at anyone who is interested in setting up their own group with inspiration for projects and a wealth of information and contacts on topics such as:-

Setting up a new group – tips on organising meetings and fundraising
Countryside Management
Energy
Environmental Improvements
Heritage Projects
Local Governance
Local Food
Recycling and Waste
Sustainable construction
Transport
Water

The Community Action Pack was launched on Wednesday 29th March 2006 at the annual ENABLE partnership get together. Nearly 100 people attended the event including many Tree and Heritage Wardens; Parish Councillors and Clerks as well as members of ENABLE. The event was a resounding success with an inspiring

keynote speech from Sophie Churchill, the new Chief Executive from the National Forest. Workshops were held on energy efficiency, parish planning, environmental improvement projects and countryside and conservation. There was a lot of positive feedback from the event with many people vowing to take more of an active interest in the National Forest, become more involved in the parish planning process and implement environmental projects such as an energy awareness campaign and tree planting in local communities. The ENABLE Steering Group would like to say a big thank you to everyone who attended the event and made it such a success.

ENABLE (Environmental Action for a Better Leicestershire) is the Leicestershire Environment Partnership, an umbrella organisation of environmental organisations, community groups and members of the public. If you would like to become a member of ENABLE and receive regular newsletters and invitations to events or get hold of a copy of the Community Action Pack, please contact- ENABLE Secretariat, Environment and Heritage, Room 500, County Hall, Glenfield, Leicester. LE3 8TE. Telephone 0116 265 7332 or email enable@leics.gov.uk

For further information on ENABLE or to download a copy of the Community Action Pack visit the ENABLE website at www.leics.gov.uk/enable

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 2006 Edition is August 1st 2006.**

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



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

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

**Rutland
County
Council**

