

# BIODIVERSITY NEWSLETTER

MAKING SPACE FOR NATURE IN WARWICK DISTRICT



SPRING 2025



Welcome to the spring edition of our seasonal biodiversity newsletter!

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## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN SPRING

**The nesting season for birds is underway. Great Tits, Blue Tits and Long-tailed Tits will be rearing young and Robins, Song Thrushes and Blackbirds will start fledging. Please do check any hedges or shrubs for nests before cutting them as it is an offence to disturb nesting birds!**

It's breeding time in the water too. Frogs will be laying their spawn, which then hatches into tadpoles within two to four weeks.

Bats and hedgehogs will be emerging from hibernation, with nighttime activity increasing throughout the season.

On sunny days, early butterflies like the Brimstone, Peacock, and Small Tortoiseshell may be spotted fluttering about.

In our woodlands, you'll find bluebells carpeting the floor. Oakley Wood and Crackley Woods have particularly impressive displays throughout spring.

Meanwhile, fruit trees will also start to blossom. Keep an eye out for Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) in hedgerows, with its sharp thorns, black-purple twigs, and white flowers from March to April. This plant is not only beautiful but also supports butterflies and moths, and its sloes provide food for birds and mammals in the autumn.



# PEREGRINE WATCH IS BACK!

**A pair of Peregrine Falcons have returned to their nest in the clock tower of Leamington Spa's Town Hall and are preparing to raise chicks again.**

In 2024, the pair laid four eggs, which hatched in late April. The three females and one male successfully fledged from the nest in early June.

Traditionally living on cliff faces, Peregrines are now increasingly seen in urban centres, thanks to tall buildings and an abundance of pigeons. They are the fastest hunters in the world, reaching dive speeds of up to 200 miles per hour.

Catch this year's action on the [live 24/7 webcams](#), from egg laying to hatching and the fledging of the chicks. Peregrine Watch LIVE is also back! Join experts on the green at Regent Grove, Leamington Spa to see the peregrines for yourself and learn more about these incredible birds. See dates and times in the events section at the bottom of the newsletter.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF POLLINATORS



**Pollinators, including bees, butterflies, beetles, wasps and even some birds and bats are essential for the health of our environment and the food we eat. These tiny creatures help plants reproduce by transferring pollen from one flower to another, allowing them to produce seeds, fruits, and vegetables. In fact, about 75% of flowering plants worldwide rely on pollinators, including many of the crops we depend on for food, such as apples, tomatoes and strawberries. Without pollinators, our gardens, local farms and natural habitats would not be as vibrant and diverse.**

Unfortunately, pollinators are facing increasing challenges. Their habitats are being lost due to urban growth, climate change and the widespread use of pesticides. This has led to worrying declines in their populations, which could have serious consequences for both wildlife and people. By creating spaces that support pollinators, such as planting wildflowers, reducing pesticide use or leaving parts of our gardens to grow wild, we can help ensure these important creatures thrive. Even small actions, like providing a hanging basket or pots with nectar-rich plants can make a difference.

## BUTTERFLIES AS POLLINATORS: KEY SPECIES IN WARWICK DISTRICT

**Butterflies play a vital role in pollination, supporting a wide range of plants and crops. In Warwick District, we're working to protect and support pollinating insects, including species like the Wood White, Dingy Skipper, and White Letter Hairstreak butterflies, as well as the Argent and Sable Moth.**

Sadly, the Argent and Sable Moth has not been recorded in the district for several years. To see this species return, we may need to reintroduce it to suitable woodland or bog habitats, where young birch

trees are available for the moth's larvae to feed on. The ongoing woodland management at Oakley Woods Local Wildlife Site could potentially provide a suitable habitat for this species in the future.

On a more positive note, the Dingy Skipper is making a comeback. In the 1990s, just 31 colonies were recorded in Warwickshire; today, that number has risen to 84. This butterfly thrives in post-industrial habitats, such as old quarries and spoil heaps, where it can find the plants it needs for pollination and its larvae can feed.

# HELP SPOT THE BROWN-BANDED CARDER BEE IN WARWICKSHIRE!



Source: Bumblebee Conservation Trust



**Bees are vital pollinators, with 276 species recorded in the UK, including bumblebees, honeybees, mason bees, mining bees, leaf cutter bees and more. In Warwick District, we're lucky to have Bee Friendly groups in Cubbington, Leamington Spa, Kenilworth, and Warwick. Kenilworth has even been recognised as one of six Bee Friendly Towns by the Bee Friendly Trust.**

A bee to watch for is the Brown-Banded Carder Bee, once thought to be extinct in Warwickshire

but rediscovered in 1995. It may be increasing due to the creation of clover-rich grasslands and the abandonment of limestone quarries. Sightings were recorded in Ufton Fields in 2023 and more could be out there!

This bee, *Bombus humilis*, is a ginger-beige colour with a brown band on its abdomen. It can be confused with the Common Carder Bee, but it's easy to distinguish by its unique markings.

## Where to Look:

Check areas like Ufton Fields or Cuttle Pool, just outside the Warwick District boundary, or look for flower-rich grasslands and old quarries. On sunny days, search for wildflowers like dandelions, knapweed, clover, and thistles.

## Spot a Brown-Banded Carder Bee?

Take clear, close-up photos of the bee's abdomen and wings, noting the date and location and then read the information on [Bee Friendly Warwick's website](#) to check what you've seen.

# PROTECTING ENDANGERED BIRDS AT ST MARY'S LANDS

**We are fortunate to have fantastic farmland birds in Warwickshire, though many are facing decline due to habitat loss, climate change and widespread use of pesticides.**

St Mary's Lands in Warwick is an important site for ground nesting birds, including Skylarks and Meadow Pipits, which have historically bred and raised their young in the meadow grass here. Both species are listed as conservation concerns in the UK, with Skylarks being at risk of extinction.

To support the recovery of these endangered birds, we install temporary fencing around their nesting areas at St Mary's Lands each year, between February and August, to ensure they remain undisturbed during the breeding season.

It's unusual to spot Skylarks in urban areas which makes their presence at St Mary's Lands all the more special and emphasises the importance

of protecting their nesting sites. We also plan to work with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to conduct surveys of these birds in their habitat, helping to inform future conservation efforts and enhance protection of this vital site.



# LEAMINGTON'S LIVING LABYRINTH: A POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY GARDEN

**In response to the 2024 Butterfly Conservation report, All Saints Parish Church in Leamington continues its commitment to biodiversity through an evolving churchyard regeneration project. Launched in autumn 2022 by ARC (Achieving Results in Communities), this initiative involves community groups, schools, and volunteers in transforming the churchyard into a vibrant green space that supports both people and pollinators.**

Over the past two years, volunteers have continued to enrich the space with native wildflower meadow seed, fruiting trees, mixed hedging, perennial flower beds, ferns, and bulbs. In 2022, the East garden was seeded with native wildflowers and is now part of BugLife's 'B-Line' project, connecting national pollinator pathways. These enhancements have boosted biodiversity and led to a reduction in antisocial behaviour, as local police officers report the area is now a welcoming, engaging space.



The next phase of the project focuses on developing a central grass area into a unique living labyrinth, inspired by the labyrinth design at Chartres Cathedral in France. This labyrinth will feature a five-circuit path framed by pollinator-friendly plants like Echinacea, Rudbeckia, Yarrow, and Verbena, providing continuous food for beneficial insects. Alliums and Narcissi bulbs will be planted this autumn for next year's bloom. The labyrinth will offer visitors a peaceful space to connect with nature while supporting vital pollinator populations.

Group planting sessions, supported by Warwick District Council, will begin in March. The church is also seeking funding to support the planting and ongoing maintenance of this feature.

For more information or to donate, please visit: All Saints Churchyard Regeneration or ARC. For queries, email: [info@allsaintschurchlabyrinth.com](mailto:info@allsaintschurchlabyrinth.com)



## WARWICKSHIRE'S LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY - UPDATE

**Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) were introduced under the Environment Act 2021 as part of efforts to reverse the decline of nature. These strategies will help identify and prioritise opportunities for nature recovery, focusing on key areas, species or habitats.**

The Warwickshire LNRS is currently under development and we hope to share more details in our Summer edition of this newsletter. In the meantime, please visit the [LNRS website](#) for further updates.

# CREATING HEALTHY WATER HABITATS FOR WILDLIFE



**Ponds, scrapes, and other water features play a vital role in supporting local wildlife by providing essential habitats and resources for a wide variety of plants and animals. Ponds are typically deeper and more permanent, while scrapes are shallow areas that may only hold water for part of the year, creating temporary wetland habitats. Both types of water features are particularly beneficial for species like amphibians, birds, and insects, offering places to breed, feed, and shelter. They also support the growth of water-loving plants such as reeds and sedges, which attract pollinators and other wildlife.**

In addition to supporting biodiversity, scrapes help reduce flooding and improve water quality by soaking up and filtering rainwater runoff. These water habitats play an important role in creating a healthier, more sustainable environment for both wildlife and people.

We have been working to protect and enhance water habitats across several of our parks and open spaces throughout February and March. This work includes desilting, widening, and fencing ponds, as well as installing new scrapes.

A good example of this work can be seen at Kenilworth Moss Local Wildlife Site, located within Castle Farm, Kenilworth, where we've installed permanent fencing around the pond. This helps prevent the spread of invasive weeds by people and dogs, while also protecting the habitat of important species. Kenilworth Moss is home to the uncommon and protected Great Crested Newt, the largest of our three native newt species. These amphibians have a distinctive jagged crest along their back when ready to breed. Although most of their adult life cycle is spent on land—hibernating in dry soil or rubble—they return to ponds to breed. However, many breeding ponds have disappeared due to intensive agriculture and other factors, and the deterioration of their habitat remains the biggest threat to this species. We are working to restore important ponds for the Great Crested Newt.

Water habitat improvements are also planned to take place at other sites, including Kenilworth Common, Parliament Piece, Harbury Lane, Pottertons Field, Tapping Way open space and other areas of Castle Farm. For more information, please visit our [biodiversity updates webpage](#).

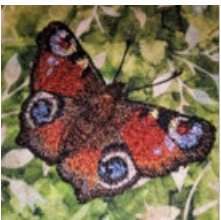
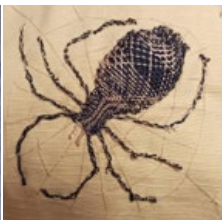
## SPRING BULBS BEGIN TO BLOOM, SUPPORTING EARLY POLLINATORS

**Spring bulbs planted last autumn are starting to bloom across parks and open spaces in the district. The daffodils and crocuses will provide essential food and nectar for early-emerging pollinators, including bees, wasps and other insects.**

These early blooms are particularly important as they help support pollinator populations, which are facing decline, especially due to changing temperatures and early hibernation patterns.

Sites such as Castle Farm, Eagle Recreation Ground, Myton Green and St Fremund's Way will soon be buzzing with activity as these flowers come to life.





# NATURE PATCHWORK: CONNECTING NATURE, CONNECTING PEOPLE - ONE PATCH AT A TIME

**Nature Patchwork is a new initiative that encourages people to create wildlife habitats in their gardens and community spaces, linking these patches to form a larger network of habitats. Whether it's planting wildflowers, installing bird boxes, or creating hedgehog highways, small actions can make a big difference.**

By connecting these patches, we help wildlife thrive and bring people closer to nature. And while your patch might be small, it's part of a larger patchwork that can make a real difference. [Check out some simple ways to create your own nature patch.](#)

Have you done something to help nature in your area? Are you planning to help in the future? Please let us know what you've done by adding it to the [#TeamWilder map](#). Your actions will inspire others and show how we can all make a difference, patch by patch.

Join us at [Leamington's Nature Patchwork launch event](#) on Saturday 8 March 2025, at The Sydni Centre to learn more. Entry is free! Further details below.

Nature Patchwork is a collaboration between Warwick District Council, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust #TeamWilder and other local community partners.

## NATIONAL HEDGEHOG MONITORING PROGRAMME - LOCAL UPDATE



**The National Hedgehog Monitoring Programme (NHMP) has revealed a promising number of hedgehog sightings in Leamington Spa, suggesting a healthy local population. In response, the newly formed Leamington Hedgehog Community is working to raise awareness and protect hedgehogs by promoting the creation of "hedgehog highways" – small holes in fences that allow hedgehogs to travel safely between gardens. The group will also represent hedgehogs at Leamington's Nature Patchwork event on 8 March 2025 at the Sydni Centre and is raising awareness through local initiatives, such as "Slow for Hedgehogs" road signs in Brunswick.**

In 2024, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust volunteers deployed 30 monitoring cameras across Brunswick to track hedgehog activity, contributing to national population data. Of the cameras, 17

recorded hedgehogs, further confirming the healthy local population. The footage, still being analysed, is available for residents to review on [MammalWeb](#). These findings will help guide future conservation efforts, including the creation of more hedgehog highways and further outreach to protect this important species.



# WAYS YOU CAN HELP NATURE AT HOME



**Plant Wildflowers:** Create a wildflower patch or seed areas with wildflower seeds to support pollinators like bees and butterflies. Wildflowers thrive in low-nutrient soils, making them ideal for thin soil areas.



**Install a Bird Box:** Help local birds by putting up a bird box in your garden to provide a safe nesting site. If you're interested in birds, take part in the [Nesting Neighbours](#) initiative by checking a local nest weekly to record activity, eggs, or chicks for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO).

**Create a Hedgehog Highway:** Cut a small hole (13cm x 13cm) in your garden fence to allow hedgehogs to safely travel between gardens and find food. [Learn how to create a hedgehog highway.](#)

**Provide Water for Wildlife:** Place a shallow dish of water in your garden for birds, insects, and other wildlife to drink. [Tips for providing water for wildlife.](#)

**Grow Nectar-Rich Plants:** Plant flowers like lavender, forget-me-nots and primroses to provide food for pollinators as they emerge in spring. [The best plants for bees and pollinators.](#)

**Cut Grass Less Often:** Let parts of your lawn grow longer to provide shelter and food for insects, small mammals and birds.

**Create a compost heap:** Composting leaves and plant waste not only helps create nutrient-rich soil but also provides a valuable habitat for a variety of wildlife species. [Learn how to compost your waste at home.](#)



**Avoid Using Herbicides:** Weed killers can be harmful to wildlife by reducing food sources, such as flowering plants for pollinators, and by killing plants that provide shelter and habitat. They can also poison wildlife through ingestion or contamination of water sources and can impact soil health. Embrace a "wild" garden by allowing some weeds to grow. If needed, remove them manually (pulling or cutting).

**Make a Hibernaculum for Reptiles:** Build a hibernaculum with stones, bricks, or corrugated sheets to create shelter for reptiles such as slow worms and snakes in your garden. [Learn how to make a hibernaculum.](#)

**Prune Carefully:** In early spring, prune dead or damaged growth to promote healthy new growth. Avoid pruning spring-flowering shrubs until after they've bloomed. Be sure to check for nesting birds before cutting back any branches and leave some cut branches to create habitat piles for wildlife.

## SPRING BULB GIVEAWAY

Around the middle of May, we'll be removing spring bulbs from the plant beds at Jephson Gardens and St Nicholas Park to make room for summer bedding plants. These bulbs are available for free and are perfect for replanting in your own garden. Keep an eye on our social media channels for more details, and feel free to pop along on the advertised dates to collect some bulbs (whilst stocks last).

# FAREWELL TO JON HOLMES: 50 YEARS OF COMMITMENT TO NATURE CONSERVATION AT WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL



**After 50 years at Warwick District Council, Jon Holmes will retire in May 2025. Starting as an apprentice at the council's tree nursery, Jon quickly became a passionate advocate for wildlife and conservation,**

**driving numerous projects including rain gardens, sensory and butterfly gardens, bug hotels, and introducing hundreds of bird boxes. He also worked on woodland and meadow creation and helped shift the council's planting schemes to more sustainable, wildlife-friendly approaches.**

Jon has been instrumental in the designation of local nature reserves and wildlife sites, ensuring they meet the necessary standards and are properly managed for wildlife. He's also worked closely with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and other partners to protect these sites long-term.

A key contributor to the council's biodiversity action programme, Jon's efforts have significantly shaped local nature conservation. He has worked alongside community groups, schools, and other partners to connect people with nature and provide more opportunities for residents to enjoy green spaces.

Jon's passion for protecting wildlife and promoting sustainability has inspired all of us. His work has left a lasting impact, and we will continue to build on the legacy he's helped create.

We wish Jon a happy and well-earned retirement.

## SPRING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

[Bee Wild](#), Saturday 14th June 2025, 11am – 4pm, Hill Close Gardens, Warwick, CV34 6HF

[Cubbington and Lillington Environmental Action Now \(CLEAN\) Spring Activities Afternoon](#), Saturday 29th March 2025, 2pm – 5pm, Cubbington Cliff Cleaver Pavilion, off Stonehouse Close, Cubbington, CV32 7LP

[Coventry and Warwickshire RSPB group events](#), throughout spring 2025

[Foundry Wood events and activities](#), Princes Drive, Leamington Spa, throughout spring 2025

[Friends of Abbey Fields nature walks](#), throughout spring 2025

[Leamington's Nature Patchwork Event](#), Saturday 8th March 2025, 11am – 3.30pm, Sydni Centre, Cottage Square, Leamington Spa, CV31 1PT

[Peregrine Watch 2025](#), Saturday 19th April, 3rd May, 17th May and 24th May 2025, 10am – 3pm, the green at Regent Grove, Leamington Spa, CV32 4AT

[The Wildlife Trusts #30DaysWild challenge](#), throughout June 2025

[Volunteering opportunities with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust](#)

[Warwickshire Country Parks events and activities](#), throughout spring 2025 – includes free moth mornings and City Nature Challenge bioblitz at Ryton Pools Country Park, Ryton Road, Bubbenhall, CV8 3BG

[Warwickshire Wildlife Trust events](#), throughout spring 2025

**If you have nature events and activities happening in Warwick District that you'd like included in future editions of this newsletter, please [get in touch](#).**

