



Secret Spaces

The status of Local Wildlife Sites 2014
& why these special places need saving



Carr Wood, Derbyshire



Dry Street Pastures, Essex



Wilderness Island, London



Small pearl bordered fritillary



Pymore Reedbed Dorset



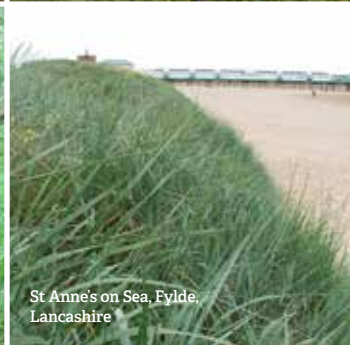
Stoke Newington East Reservoir, London



Embleton Local Wildlife Site (within a golf course), Northumberland



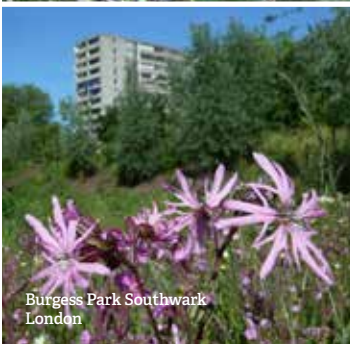
Drayton Drewray, Norfolk



St Anne's on Sea, Fylde, Lancashire



Copper Hill, Lincolnshire



Burgess Park Southwark, London



Breach Hill Common, Avon



Bombus lucorum Foxholes Heath, Derbyshire

Secret Spaces

The status of England's Local Wildlife Sites 2014

From mystical ancient woodlands and vibrant, colourful meadows to quiet churchyards and bustling flower-rich roadsides; and, from field-bordering hedgerows to tiny copses, England enjoys special, often unnoticed wild places where nature thrives. These “secret spaces”, known as Local Wildlife Sites, are truly exceptional areas of land with significant wildlife value. They are frequently a legacy of the goodwill and care of their landowners and managers and of decades of hard graft by conservationists.

Local Wildlife Sites cover at least five percent of England's land mass. They vary substantially in size and shape.

They can be privately or publically owned and found in the depths of the countryside and nestled in busy towns and cities. These special areas have been identified and selected by partnerships of local authorities, ecologists and local nature experts using robust, scientifically determined criteria and detailed ecological surveys.

Unlike many nature reserves, these special places are not protected by law and most are not owned by conservation organisations. While they have no direct legal status, Local Wildlife Sites are considered important enough to receive recognition within the planning system. National planning policy¹ requires local authorities to identify Local Wildlife Sites and provide for their protection through local policy.

But, the demands on our land have never been greater. Predicted growth in housing, new roads and other infrastructure are all set to increase. Changes to farm environment schemes are reducing the incentives for owners of Local Wildlife Sites to gain support for their management; austerity measures threaten the

management of publically-owned sites. Then there is the question of how people and wildlife will respond to a changing climate. When these factors are considered in combination, it is no surprise that these important refuges for wildlife are vulnerable and have never been under so much pressure.



Cowslips
at Crich Chase, Derbyshire

Every three years The Wildlife Trusts publish an assessment of Local Wildlife Sites based on a national survey of Local Wildlife Site partnerships. This report accompanies a full technical report *'The status of England's Local Wildlife Sites 2014'* and presents some of the key points and trends along with some background information. Despite their considerable value to wildlife and people, Local Wildlife Sites are being lost and damaged at a significant rate.

Who treasures and takes care of these places?

Most Local Wildlife Sites are in private ownership and it is ultimately landowners and farmers, often with the support of nature conservationists, who secure the ongoing existence of these special places – through sensitive habitat management and sheer commitment and care for nature.

There are also more than 50 partnerships of local authorities, conservation bodies, Local Record Centres and local specialists across most of the country, helping to care for these amazing places. Each partnership is responsible for surveying, assessing and selecting sites against robust local criteria. Once sites are selected, partners can advise landowners on land management and grants. They should also periodically monitor the sites to assess their status and the effectiveness of the advice given. Unfortunately, due to a lack of resources most sites are not regularly revisited and, consequently, we don't have a complete picture of their condition: this report provides a snap-shot of what we do know and presents some worrying trends.

Why do Local Wildlife Sites matter?

Local Wildlife Sites are vitally important for wildlife and people alike. Many studies have shown how they add value to local communities and contribute significantly to our quality of life, health, well-being and education. While many are private and/or out of reach - the very existence of this network of thousands of areas of natural habitat across the country contributes to the wildlife we find in our gardens, parks and other public natural spaces. Ultimately, they also provide some of the natural services we rely on to maintain a healthy and sustainable environment; such as clean air and water, pollinators and food production, and flood resilience.

Improved health, well-being and social interaction

As a population, we are experiencing increasing levels of obesity and physical inactivity² and one in four of us will experience a mental health problem at some point in our lives³ Yet natural places such as Local Wildlife Sites can encourage physical activity and help to improve health. In general:

- individuals with easy access to nature are three times more likely to participate in physical activity and 40% less likely to become overweight or obese^{4,5}
- people living near moderate or high quality green space are twice as likely to report low psychological distress than those living near low quality open spaces⁶
- the simple act of viewing nature from a window can reduce stress, increase recovery from illness and improve concentration and mood^{7,8,9,10}
- nature close to the home increases the ability of children to cope with stressful life events, directed attention and cognitive function^{11,12}
- access to nearby nature can facilitate social interaction which in turn provides direct health benefits^{13,14}
- nature near the home reduces the risk of crime, aggression and domestic violence^{15,16,17,18}

In the UK, the costs of physical inactivity to the economy are £20 billion per year including direct treatment costs and work days lost through sickness¹⁹ and in 2009-2010 the total cost of mental health problems was estimated at £105.2 billion²⁰



Norfolk Wildlife Trust staff meeting a owner

Moss Farm Staffordshire



Friends of Carr Wood hay making, Derbyshire



Hickinwood Pond Derbyshire

White admiral, Gutteridge Wood, London



Upper Beanhall Meadows, Worcestershire

“Because of the way sites are selected for national protection, the wildlife-rich habitats of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire receive virtually no legal protection. Just over 1% of our region is protected – the national average is just under 8%. Our Local Wildlife Sites, without the status of national sites, but which may have just as much wildlife value, therefore support the vast majority of our wildlife. Most survive thanks to sympathetic landowners, and they need support. Without these sites quite simply we would have virtually no wildlife left.”

Matt Jackson, Head of Conservation, Policy and Strategy at Berks, Bucks, Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)

Along with our statutory protected sites like Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites now represent the core areas where much of England’s wildlife resides. As changes in land-use have eroded and fragmented the wildlife-rich expanse of habitats that once covered the country, these places are now refuges for wildlife – remnant ‘islands’ in a ‘sea’ of intensively managed urban, coastal and rural landscapes. Some habitats such as wildflower meadows, mires, fens and wet woodlands are now so scarce that the majority qualify for Local Wildlife Site status as a minimum. They offer vital havens for a wealth of wildlife including many threatened and declining plants such as: frog orchid, green winged orchid, Isle of Man cabbage, limestone fern, marsh gentian and the beautifully named coral necklace; and animals including: pearl-bordered fritillary, grizzled skipper, yellow wagtail, noble chafer, grass snake, slow-worm, harvest mouse and water vole.

Vital havens for England’s wildlife

Eighty percent of threatened vascular plants, all priority butterfly species and significant areas of England’s most important habitats can be found in Local Wildlife Sites ²¹

But no matter how rich in wildlife they are on their own, these sites are not enough to sustain wildlife populations indefinitely. Little by little species start to disappear. The State of Nature report, ²² published in 2013 by a partnership of conservation organisations, revealed that over the past 50 years, 60 percent of 3,148 native wildlife species studied have

been in decline, with 30 percent in sharp decline. And currently, more than one in ten of all the species assessed are under threat of disappearing altogether.

If society wants to stop and reverse this trend of wildlife loss and provide for nature’s recovery, we have to expand, restore and recreate habitats on a landscape-scale, way beyond the boundaries of traditional nature reserves and wildlife sites. This is central to The Wildlife Trusts’ Living Landscape vision ²³ and core to the outcome of a comprehensive review of England’s Wildlife Sites led by Professor Sir John Lawton in 2010 ²⁴. This review revealed that there were ‘serious shortcomings’ in our existing network. It recommended that ‘greater protection’ should be given to Local Wildlife Sites and their management ‘must be improved’. It concluded that ‘we need to take steps to rebuild nature’ by providing more natural areas, which are bigger, better and more joined up, so that existing fragments of wildlife-rich land are reconnected to create a climate-resilient and self-sustaining whole.

Local Wildlife Sites are key to making this happen. As the natural ‘green’ fabric of our towns and countryside, collectively they create a web of stepping stones and corridors for wildlife. They buffer and knit the gaps between other nature conservation sites and natural spaces and they provide the essential foundations around which we should be able to bring about nature’s recovery.

Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

There is a general misconception that all the best nature conservation sites are designated and legally protected. This is not the case. While the network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) is crucially important, they represent only a small sample of our most important habitats and their species; the SSSI network is selective and is not intended to be comprehensive. Numerous areas with equivalent nature conservation value are not designated as SSSIs and have no protection despite being of equal or greater value to wildlife.

By contrast, the approach for Local Wildlife Sites is comprehensive: all sites which meet the given criteria are selected, some of which are of SSSI quality. Consequently, in some counties Local Wildlife Sites are where most of our special wildlife can be found. For example, in Nottinghamshire, SSSIs account for just 1.5 percent of the county’s area whilst Local Wildlife Sites cover 10 percent. In Greater London there are just 37 SSSIs compared to more than 1,500 Local Wildlife Sites, covering eight times the area and almost 20 percent of the capital. Even in traditionally wildlife-rich areas of the country, Local Wildlife Sites are vital. In Wiltshire, for example, 75 percent of deciduous woodland is found in Local Wildlife Sites, compared with just 10 percent in SSSIs; and in Derbyshire outside of the Peak District National Park, 978 hectares of semi-natural grassland is within Local Wildlife Sites and only 179 hectares within SSSIs.

Refuges at risk: the problems

Despite their considerable value, Local Wildlife Sites are being lost and damaged at a significant rate. Damage can range from destruction of all or part of a site through to a decline in habitat quality and species-richness. A recent survey undertaken in 2013/14 by The Wildlife Trusts²⁶ found that 717 out of 6,590 (or 11%) of Local Wildlife Sites monitored were reported lost or damaged in the five years between 2009 and 2013.

However, this figure could just be the tip of the iceberg – as lack of resources mean that only 15% of England's 42,865 Local Wildlife Sites have been checked within the last five years.

A 2008 report by Norfolk Wildlife Trust concluded that

69%

of the 60 grassland Local Wildlife Sites visited between 2005-2008 were in poor and declining condition.

The sense of degradation and the erosion of biodiversity is even more evident from local data. In just five years, the habitat quality of 118 (9%) of Dorset's Local Wildlife Sites deteriorated significantly. In Kent, 45 sites have been damaged and three lost out of just 147 monitored; and in North Yorkshire, of the 233 sites visited, 69 sites were found to be damaged and nine had been lost altogether.

Regrettably, this is not a new trend. Between 1984 and 2008, 130 of Derbyshire's Local Wildlife Sites were destroyed and another 62 were reduced in size. In Cheshire West & Chester, almost a third of grassland Local Wildlife Sites have declined in the last 16 years, and in Worcestershire at least 48 grassland Local Wildlife Sites (covering an area of 238 hectares) have been lost, damaged or have deteriorated since 2005.

The same survey identified that the biggest threats are lack of management or the wrong kind of management; and more than half of the partnerships also cited development as a key threat. Deterioration and loss of species is a serious issue as this can lead to sites being 'deselected' and losing their protection and status within the planning system.

These threats are aggravated by a severe lack of resources. Forty five out of 47 partnerships reported that they urgently require more resources to ensure the effective identification, management and protection of Local Wildlife Sites in their area. The lack of resources means that site surveys remain incomplete, sites are not recognised, protected or monitored and, vitally, no help or money is on hand to advise and support owners with the care of their sites or in applying for grants and additional funding.

The survey found that less than a quarter of partnerships provide land management advice for all sites in their area, with constraints linked to lack of time and staff to identify and keep track of changing land ownership and to provide the relevant advice. This lack of capacity also impacts on the time available to support landowners to apply for land management grants and subsidies. Currently, only three partnerships are providing this service for all sites; with almost a third unable to provide any support at all.

The survey showed that the number of paid and volunteer staff working specifically on Local Wildlife Sites in England is in the region



The bad...Damage to Local Wildlife Site at Dale Road, Buxton, Derbyshire



The good...Frog orchid thriving at Lots Lane Pasture, Derbyshire

In Cumbria
35 out of

128

upland hay meadow Local Wildlife Sites were deselected following surveys between 2008-2011 due to their declining wildlife diversity.



"I cannot remember exactly when I first started volunteering at Wilderness Island but I do remember clearing up the fallen trees as a result of the October 1987 storm. I did not realise then that nearly 30 years later I would be leading the tasks. It has been an interesting and rewarding journey; very much punctuated by bursts of activity by staff from London Wildlife Trust when we have been fortunate enough to gain funding for major habitat works."

Volunteer - Wilderness Island Local Wildlife Site, London Borough of Sutton

of one for every 100 sites and, of these, more than 70% do so in a part-time capacity. The distribution of staff is not evenly spread, so in some parts of the country there are far fewer resources available. Volunteers and local communities have a vital role to play in the future of many Local Wildlife Sites but they are frequently given only limited resources and support.

The impact of development on Local Wildlife Sites cuts across all regions, but for some areas the threat is greater, with almost all the partnerships in the North West, East Midlands and eastern parts of the country expressing concern. While it is potentially reassuring to discover that most local authorities appear to have local plan policies in place to protect Local Wildlife Sites, unfortunately, less than a quarter of partnerships reported these protection policies to be consistently and effectively applied, with a number of partnerships sharing the concern that pressure to allocate land for housing and employment is placing Local Wildlife Sites under growing threat.

The rapid decline in the number of professional ecologists and access to expertise in local authorities is another matter for major concern.

It is not just the weakness or inconsistent application of individual policies and planning decisions that concern local partnerships. Other 'development' activities can erode these sites too, including activities such as garden expansions into adjoining woodland and grassland, change of use for example to golf course developments and permitted development for recreational activities like paintballing. While these impacts may be small and gradual on their own, in combination and over time they result in a significant attrition of this vital nature network. This is exacerbated by the failure of some planning authorities to monitor and enforce planning conditions intended to compensate for development damage.

The Wildlife Trusts work with hundreds of developments every year to find positive solutions which integrate the needs of people and developers with the needs of wildlife. There is a considerable body of evidence to show that well designed developments are more valuable, more popular and healthier places to live.

Whatever the causes, if this trend of loss and damage is allowed to continue, more of our most valuable and treasured wildlife and wild places will be lost forever.

What is needed?

1

Greater recognition and protection for Local Wildlife Sites'

Local authorities and developers need to fully recognise the importance of Local Wildlife Sites in the planning and decision-making process. Central Government needs to provide a range of incentives to encourage developers to work with the grain of nature rather than against it. Natural England must strengthen its standing advice to local authorities on Local Wildlife Sites.

2

Local ecological networks

Local plans should be required to create a high quality network of more, bigger, better and joined up wildlife-rich places including Local Wildlife Sites. These must be designed and planned from the bottom up involving local people and close to where they live.

3

Provide targeted funding

Defra, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and Natural England must prioritise funding and specialist advice to landowners and farmers for the enhancement and management of Local Wildlife Sites through Countryside Stewardship and other grants schemes.

4

Support volunteers, local organisations and local communities

Local authorities and Government should support volunteering and resource Local Wildlife Site partnerships as a cost effective way of looking after many of these special places and to help local people get involved in looking after them.


5

A Nature and Wellbeing Act

We urgently need new legislation for the 21st century to underpin the recovery of nature and secure improvements in the health and wellbeing of local people and communities. The Wildlife Trusts and RSPB have put forward proposals for a Nature and Wellbeing Act to do just this. Developing a coherent network of high quality Local Wildlife Sites and other natural spaces like parks and river corridors would be a key part of this Act. Local Wildlife Sites hold much of England's wildlife and as such they are key to realising the benefits which nature can provide for society.

What can you do?

Help save our secret spaces

- 
- ✓ **Support our campaign for a Nature and Wellbeing Act and the creation of local ecological networks across the country.** wildlifetrusts.org/actfornature

 - ✓ **Get involved by joining your local Wildlife Trust or becoming a volunteer to help look after your Local Wildlife Sites.**

 - ✓ **Find out where there are Local Wildlife Sites near you, which are open to the public, and get to know and enjoy them. Ask your local Wildlife Trust.**

 - ✓ **If you own or manage a piece of land listed as a Local Wildlife Site or are aware of any land that has special wildlife value and may qualify as a Local Wildlife Site, please contact your Wildlife Trust. We will be able to offer direct advice or point you in the right direction for advice on a whole range of issues including management options, surveys and development planning.**

Case Studies

Saved from the brink of development



1 Aylestone Meadows is a beautiful Local Wildlife Site and Local Nature Reserve in the centre of Leicester. In 2011, this tranquil haven was threatened by a controversial planning proposal by the council to develop floodlit football pitches.

Hundreds of people and local organisations objected to

the plans and campaigned against the development. Finally the councillors rejected the plans by a slim margin, on the grounds that the pitch did not justify the damage that would be caused.

Later in the year, a survey revealed Aylestone Meadows to be the best Local Wildlife Site in Leicestershire. Over 600 species were found, including grass snakes, badgers, otters, meadow saxifrage and common meadow-rue. The survey also uncovered rare hybrid willows and the very rare slender spike rush.

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust is now working with Leicester City Council and local people to manage and enhance the Meadows as part of a fully connected natural landscape along the Soar Valley.

Funding as a catalyst for long-term management and custodianship

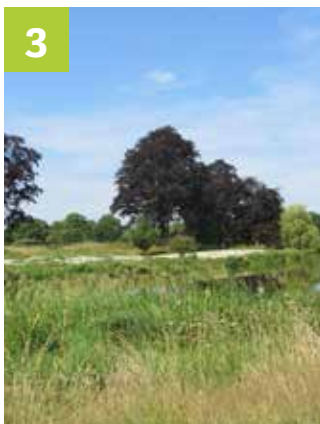


2 Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Goway Connect project is about restoring and connecting high-quality habitat along the River Goway corridor, allowing wildlife to disperse and recolonise. As part of a four-year project funded by WREN, Cheshire Wildlife Trust has been working with owners of Local Wildlife Sites along the corridor.

One such location is a Local Wildlife Site comprised of semi-improved grassland, unimproved neutral grassland, rush pasture and swamp. A lack of grazing had resulted in severe scrub encroachment and loss of grassland habitat. In 2011, steps were taken to change this, when Cheshire Wildlife Trust, working with the landowner, introduced a herd of native longhorn cattle. Three years on, the site's condition has improved with a range of habitats and species present including the beautiful common spotted orchid.

This place has served as an amazing catalyst for neighbouring landowners who have since been inspired to work with Cheshire Wildlife Trust to improve their own Local Wildlife Sites, with fantastic results for local wildlife.

The value of data and farm environment grants



3 Contacts and baseline data from the Kent Local Wildlife Site network have helped to facilitate successful habitat restoration and wildlife engagement projects on the River Eden in south-west Kent.

Kent Wildlife Trust's Return to Eden project involved farms and land holdings along the length of the River Eden (the river is a

Local Wildlife Site), ranging from back gardens to large-scale arable farms and golf courses. It provided habitat management advice and helped implement practical conservation projects.

Overall, 290 hectares of farmland was helped into 10-year agri-environment schemes, and over two kilometres of river bank was protected from damage and erosion by livestock.

Hay meadows and wetland habitat were also created or restored, and baseline data collected for many species.

Restoration of semi-improved grassland has continued and Kent Wildlife Trust has worked with landowners to introduce management regimes and plans for each site. Landowners, volunteers and the local community have been trained in species recording and meadow restoration to secure long-term benefits.

Community effort creates a valued local asset



Hard work at Bell Mere Pool Local Wildlife Site in Lincolnshire demonstrates how these sites have the potential to benefit not only local wildlife, but also the local community. Five years after its selection, Bell Mere Pool, owned by The Sutterton Parochial Charity Trust, was still found to be in great condition and under positive conservation management. The credit

goes to the volunteer group, established by long-standing tenant Terry Despicht. Motivated by national species decline and the loss of important habitats, the group has created a diverse wildlife haven with ponds and tree, scrub and wildflower areas. Wheelchair and pushchair access was made possible in 2012 when the group installed a path.

The group has received several grants and much guidance from various sources, including Rural Action and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. In addition, Boston Borough Council has commissioned a conservation management plan to help inform the group about the site's future care and management.

Butterflies on the Brink Project



The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire's Butterflies on the Brink project focuses on restoring high-quality grasslands and connecting them to provide dispersal links for local wildlife. It forms part of a two-and-a-half year project funded by Biffa Award and

involved the Trust working with owners of Local Wildlife Sites in the North Chiltern Chalk Living Landscape.

Hudnall Field, is a privately owned Local Wildlife Site in South Bedfordshire. It comprises nationally rare Lowland Calcareous Grassland which was in an impoverished state due to the cessation of grazing. The site's fencing was in disrepair and scrub encroachment was leading to the loss of rare grassland habitat. The Trust carried out scrub clearance, opening up parts of the grassland and enabling important plant species to thrive. Funds were also successfully secured on behalf of the farmer from Chiltern Conservation Board for the erection of new livestock fencing. The new fencing was completed in 2013 and the site has since been grazed by sheep.

Motivating action with advice and support



After surveying Local Wildlife Sites, Shropshire Wildlife Trust will often produce a simple management plan to serve as a guide for the landowner. Packed with drawings and photographs, the colourful plan includes a description of the site and its value, management recommendations with a

timeline of objectives, and key species to look out for.

In addition, the Trust will sometimes undertake and pay for practical help to get the landowner started with the management regime. For example, the owner of Steetley Fields Local Wildlife Site, Mr Cheetham, gave permission for his site to be surveyed at a Local Wildlife Site owners event. Funding from WREN for Shropshire Wildlife Trust's Oswestry Hills Butterflies and Grasslands Project enabled it to undertake scrub clearance to improve the habitat. Motivated by the offer of help, Mr Cheetham did some advance scrub clearance himself and is now using the management plan to maintain the habitat.

Personal reflections

“ My interest in ecology was sparked by Hawth Woods, a Local Wildlife Site in West Sussex. Walking paths flanked by bluebells, riding bicycles through the dips and hollows left by iron ore mines we children navigated by the King and Queen Oak. As a teenager I returned to find that they were beech trees – one fallen, the space filled with light, a score of saplings racing for the sky. Later I studied the wood - unravelling its history and ecology from maps and plants. I've visited hundreds of woodlands since and many have been far richer, but none were in the right place at the right time. Conserving the wild places on our doorstep has remained one of my primary motivations and is essential if future generations are to be inspired about nature.”

Kieron Huston, Senior Local Wildlife Sites Officer, Derbyshire

“ This beautiful south-facing site is part of Essex's finest complex of old meadows. Rare bumble-bees and other invertebrates, scarce butterflies and wild orchids, reptiles and badgers, bats and songbirds share these horse-grazed pastures, located beside one of Essex Wildlife Trust's finest nature reserves. Yet, despite fierce opposition, plans for the building of 725 homes on much of the site have been approved, with off-site mitigation proposed for an isolated arable location twelve kilometres away. This was despite Basildon New Town's planners having located a purpose-built equestrian centre adjacent to, and complementary with, the pastures in question. The loss will be felt by many.”

Dr Rod Cole, on Dry Street Pastures, Essex

“ When Sulby Gardens was recognised as a Local Wildlife Site by the Wildlife Trust, it demonstrated significant support for the habitat creation and improvement schemes being carried out here, and I feel very proud that these twelve acres are considered to be making a valid contribution towards the extensive conservation work being carried out by the Trust county-wide.”

Alison Lowe, owner of Sulby Gardens Local Wildlife Site in Northamptonshire

“ It's a delight to find such a rich wildlife area without venturing into the wider countryside. Expanses of bluebells in the woods, and clouds of butterflies in the meadows are just two of the highlights -and there's always something different from week to week. Before we turned it into a nature reserve, few local people knew that it was there for them to enjoy. Now it's different, but even with well-used paths and the nearby housing estate, trunk road and airport, it's still a place where you feel you can lose yourself. The need for work hasn't lessened though – keeping those bluebells and butterflies happy isn't always easy – but it's great to know we were able to take Gutteridge Woods on and protect it.”

Roger Taylor, on Gutteridge Wood, Hillingdon, London

“ I am delighted to be associated with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust in developing and improving the land I own at Huxley so it remains a place of special interest for wildlife and continues to be one of the best examples of species-rich lowland meadow in Cheshire.”

Landowner, Local Wildlife Site, Cheshire

“As soon as the Local Wildlife Site citation arrived, it triggered a new focus by containing information relating to wildlife interest well beyond our own limited knowledge. Thanks to our increased awareness, a whole new sense of proprietorship has emerged. Our observations have increased and attitudes to land management changed. Little successes will follow as a result of doing something beneficial somewhere. Almost overnight we have moved from passive to active conservationists!”

Mike Bax, Local Wildlife Site owner, Kent

“When I think about Local Wildlife Sites in Worcestershire, I think about lowland meadows. Some of the best and most continuous examples, can be found in east Worcestershire on the heavy Liassic Clays. Here there are some superb ridge-furrow meadows – some on a prehistoric earthworks scale, where you could lose a cow in the furrows! This area evokes some of my best - and worst - experiences. The Trust has worked hard over the years to join up ‘stepping-stones’, and engage with landowners, so that we now own two Local Wildlife Site meadows in the corridor and two SSSIs, and we have one Local Wildlife Site signed up to our ‘Restoring Worcestershire’s Grasslands’ project and three more in Environmental Stewardship schemes... and yet others still suffer damage either by fertilizer applications or by ploughing. This is proof that the Local Wildlife Sites system and the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations are still not rigorous enough to prevent loss!”

Michael Liley, Conservation Officer, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

“St Mary’s churchyard in Coddendam is a beautiful example of unimproved neutral grassland, a Lowland meadow habitat, boasting characteristic herbs such as lady’s bedstraw, common knapweed, ox-eye daisy, meadow buttercup and cowslip and includes plants indicative of its underlying chalk geology; pyramidal orchid, small scabious, hoary plantain, burnet saxifrage and quaking grass.

Managed sensitively as a conservation area by the Churchyard Management Group, the site remains an important refuge for wildlife whilst still being valued as a much needed spiritual and contemplative environment by the local community and visitors alike.

The site and surrounding landscape of roadside nature reserves, ancient woodland, hedgerow and lowland meadows offer numerous opportunities for adults and children to observe nationally rare invertebrates, scarce plant communities plus birds and animals such as barn owls, cuckoo, sky lark, brown hare, hedgehog, and bats in their natural environment, and visitors are frequently delighted by the summer gatherings of swifts, swooping and soaring above the church.”

Leonie Washington, Local Wildlife Site Adviser, Suffolk Wildlife Trust

“Establishment of Bell Mere Pool as a recognised [Local] Wildlife Site was a great boost to our enthusiasm... The support and information offered is so important. To date the rewards have been a growing number of appreciative visitors to the area throughout the year, especially as many are youngsters brought in by adults who recognise what such an area has to offer. Bell Mere Pool is now annually visited by a number of greylag geese and it is also apparent that there is more evidence of other wildlife taking up residence.”

Terry Despicht, community resident and tenant of Bell Mere Pool Local Wildlife Site

#SecretSpaces

wildlifetrusts.org/secretspace



With more than 800,000 members,
The Wildlife Trusts are the biggest grassroots
organisation in the UK dedicated to the protection
and restoration of all wildlife on land and sea.
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Picture Credits

Cover buttercups at Crich Chase Meadow, Derbyshire – Kieron Huston. **P2** Carr Wood, Derbyshire – Rob Oakley, Dry Street Pastures, Essex – Dr Rod Cole, Wilderness Island, London – Mathew Frith, small pearl bordered fritillary – Tom Marshall, Pymore Reedbed, Dorset – Richard Gillingham, Stoke Newington, East Reservoir - Berkeley Homes, Embleton Local Wildlife Site and golf course, Northumberland – Naomi Waite, St Annes-on-Sea Fylde -The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside, Drayton Drewray, Norfolk – J Allaway, Copper Hill Local Wildlife Site, Lincolnshire – Rob Oakley, Burgess Park, Southwark, London – Mathew Frith, Breach Hill Common, Avon – Avon Wildlife Trust, *bombus lucorum* male, Foxholes Heath, Derbyshire – Kieron Huston. **P3** cowslips at Crich Chase Meadow, Derbyshire. **P4** Site owner with adviser – Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Moss Farm, Staffordshire – Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Friends of Carr Wood hay-making, Derbyshire – Kieron Huston, Hickinwood Pond, Derbyshire – Kieron Huston, White admiral - Gutteridge Wood, London - Val Borrell, Upper Beanhall Meadows, Worcestershire - Steve Bloomfield, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. **P6/7** Damage to Local Wildlife Site, Dale Road, Derbyshire – Kieron Huston, Frog orchid, Lots Lane Pasture, Derbyshire – Kieron Huston. **P8/9** Cowslip at Crich Chase Meadow, Derbyshire – Kieron Huston, Hickinwood pond, Derbyshire – Kieron Huston, Upper Beanhall Meadows, Worcestershire - Steve Bloomfield, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Brockley Cemetery, London – Mathew Frith, Coles Hill Quarry, Derbyshire – Kieron Huston. **P10** Aylestone Meadows, Leicestershire - Uta Hamzaoui, Longhorn – Tom Marshall, Hever Meadow River, Kent – Anna David, Kent Wildlife Trust. **P11** Bell Mere Pool – Richard Croft, Local Wildlife Site, South Bedfordshire – Laura Downton, Shropshire Local Wildlife Site owner – Fiona Gomersall