WILTSHIRE LIFE

One magazine, one county

Established since 1946

Natural wonders:

Your monthly guide to the county's wildlife

in partnership with

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

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“The remarkable support from The Hills Group has resulted in the Trust achieving key outcomes which improve the environment and encourage more people to enjoy the natural world and live more sustainable enriching lives.”

Dr Gary Mantle, Chief Executive, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

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Introduction

Protecting wildlife and habitats

Our reserves provide safe havens for all to enjoy.

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust was founded in 1962, driven by a concern to protect local wildlife and natural habitats. Our first nature reserve was Blackmoor Copse, a Site of Scientific Interest and one of the most important woods in Wiltshire for butterflies. Today, the Trust manages 38 nature reserves across the county, including wetlands, woodland, meadows and chalk downland.

Working with local people we have rescued wildflower meadows, ancient woodland, lakes, rivers and chalk grasslands throughout Wiltshire. We are passionate about getting people outdoors to experience nature and to take action to ensure its protection.

One of the Trust's aims is to inspire and support people to live more sustainably. We do this through connecting people with nature on our reserves, to improve their health and wellbeing. We also provide opportunities for outdoor learning, promote waste reduction and recycling, and campaign to protect wildlife and respond urgently to the threats posed by climate change.

Over 2,000 volunteers help deliver our work, performing all kinds of tasks, such as Volunteer Warden, hands-on conservation work, or administration support in our head office.

We have 19,000 members who enable all this by generously donating. If you think the work we do is important and want to protect nature in Wiltshire, then please consider joining us – find out more at www.wiltshirewildlife.org/join-us, call us on 01380 725670 or email membership@wiltshirewildlife.org.

PHOTO BY STEPHEN DAVIES

Blackmoor Copse

Accessibility

Making nature available to all

The challenge of providing access and facilities.

We do our best to ensure our nature reserves are accessible to all, and we are working to best practice guidelines, such as those of The Sensory Trust, to increase accessibility for all visitors. While this is not always possible due to the nature of some locations, details of facilities for visitors with disabilities can be found on our website – www.wiltshirewildlife.org – alternatively, give us a call on 01380 725670 for details.

We also offers some free events (subsidised through grant funding), which are available to lower income families, from time to time. Please see our website – www.wiltshirewildlife.org/events – for more information.

PHOTO BY RALPH HARVEY

January

Drummers and water rails

Frost has a stark beauty that rewards the hardy visitor.

Start the New Year off with a nature walk. What better way is there to get over the excesses of Christmas and New Year, than exploring what nature has to offer? Listen out for great spotted woodpecker 'drumming' on the bare trees of some of our woodland nature reserves (***Blackmoor Copse***, ***Green Lane Wood and Clouts Wood*** are some great examples).

Skulking in the ditches at ***Smallbrook Meadow***, the water rail is a winter visitor.

For scenes of beauty, particularly on those frosty mornings, head to some of the downland reserves – ***Cockey Down***, ***Morgan's Hill and High Clear Down*** and enjoy watching the sunrise over the landscape.

Did you know?

Water rails are not often seen in flight as they prefer to migrate under cover of darkness.

PHOTO BY DARIN SMITH

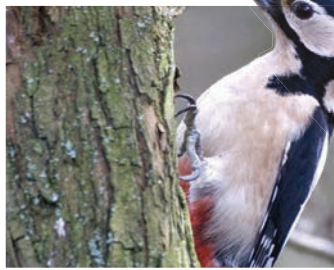

PHOTO BY EMMA KIRKUP

Green Lane Wood

February

A carpet made of snowdrops

Milder conditions see life begin to bloom.

Snowdrops adorn the floor at ***Peppercombe Woods*** at Urchfont, so take a visit during February and don't forget to bring your camera!

Rooks begin to repair their rookeries high in the trees, ready for their new arrivals later in the spring. If the conditions are mild then the ponds at ***Langford Lakes*** and ***Lower Moor*** will see the arrival of frog spawn in late February.

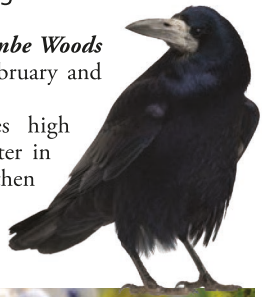

PHOTO BY STEVE DAY

PHOTO BY OWAIN SHAW

Lower Moor Farm

March

Will you be boxing or basking?

This month, look out for the return of bright colours.

The bright yellows of wild daffodils adorn some of the woodland floor at ***Oysters Coppice***, near Semley. Towards the end of March you may also see wood anemone and celandines all bringing with them a wealth of colour to the woods.

At ***Blakehill Farm***, look out for the 'mad March hares' boxing. March is their mating season and the boxing that you can sometimes spot is usually a result of a female fending off a persistent male.

Did you know?

The slow worm is neither a worm nor a snake, but is in fact a legless lizard!

As the weather begins to warm, reptiles including slow worm and lizards can be found basking in the sunshine at ***Middleton Down*** and ***Coombe Bissett Down***.

HARE PHOTO BY DAVID KJAER; LIZARD PHOTO BY DARIN SMITH; SLOW WORM PHOTO BY BEVERLEY HEATH

PHOTO BY RYAN TABOR

Oysters Coppice

Spring Transition

Season of arrivals and emergence

Blossoms and swallows, cuckoos and fawns.

As the days become longer and the temperature begins to rise, the landscape comes to life with the emergence of new shoots, colourful displays of flowers and the sounds of life.

Cuckoos arrive mid to late April with their calls to herald the summer days ahead, swallows return from Africa, and trees are awash with colour and blossoms.

Dragonflies and damselflies emerge, butterflies begin to flutter above the flowers in search of nectar and orchids peak on the chalk downlands in June.

Spring is an ideal time to look out for new arrivals – roe deer fawns in the woodlands, froglets and toadlets emerging from ponds and lakes, and ducklings swimming by.

PHOTO BY DARIN SMITH

Summer Transition

Abundance, colour and life

Let your senses bask in resplendent nature.

Summer is when nature is at its most abundant – flowers, leaves, animals, insects… our mixed habitat reserves become awash with colour and life.

Look to the sky to see butterflies and dragonflies. Watch grasshoppers ping away with every step you make through grassland and follow the trails of bees as they search for flowers.

Whether you head to our woodland, downland or wetland reserves you will be sure of plenty of wildlife to find. Why not take along a picnic and let your senses bask in nature?

PHOTO BY RYAN TABOR

April

Blossoms and our returning swallows

Dodge the showers to see a festival of flowers.

Primroses reach their peak, flowering in the woodland reserves during this warmer spring month. April also sees the return of the swallows, having migrated from Africa and an abundance of blossom from cherry trees and blackthorn bushes.

The Snakeshead fritillary, a wetland species of flower provides a brilliant and popular display in some of the meadows at ***Lower Moor*** and ***Upper Waterhay*** nature reserves. At Upper Waterhay they tend to be white flowers, while at Lower Moor you will find the purple variety, as well as other wildflowers, like green-winged orchid.

Towards the end of the month, cowslips begin to appear on the chalk downland. ***Coombe Bissett Down*** is an ideal spot to find them, so why not take a circular walk of the reserve where you will see some of our newly born lambs and calves too?

PHOTO BY STEVE DAY

PHOTO BY GRAHAM COULES

PHOTO BY STEVE DAY

Lower Moor

May

Damsels, bluebells, and buttercups

Let the skylarks sing you on your way.

May is an ideal time to visit our woodland nature reserves, because it is the best time of year to see native bluebells carpet the forest floor. Tucked beside an industrial estate in Swindon, ***Hagbourne Copse nature reserve*** comes alive with purple and blue tones of these spring species, and ***Blackmoor Copse*** is another fine location for taking a bluebell walk.

As May progresses, damselflies begin to emerge from the wetlands. At ***Lower Moor*** and ***Langford Lakes***, see if you can spot them darting over the ponds and streams. The broad-bodied chaser dragonfly is usually around by then too. Look above and you may see a hobby, here to prey on the damsel and dragonflies.

Listen out for the song of the skylark over ***Middleton Down***, and keep your eyes peeled for the beautiful Adonis blue and marsh fritillary butterflies at ***Morgan's Hill*** and ***High Clear Down***.

Buttercups light up the damp meadows and top the chalky hilltops with a dusting of yellow; in the skies you can see the welcome return of swifts.

PHOTO BY JESSIE LOW

PHOTO BY MARK BRISCOE

PHOTO BY RALPH HARVEY

Hagbourne Copse

PHOTO BY RYAN TABOR
UPPER WATERHAY
LOWER MOOR
BLAKEHILL FARM
MALMESBURY
RAVENSROOST WOOD
ECHO LODGE MEADOWS
SWINDON
HAGBOURNE COPSE
CLOUTS WOOD
HIGH CLEAR DOWN
CHIPPENHAM
MORGAN'S HILL
MARLBOROUGH
DEVIZES
PEPPERCOMBE WOODS

GREEN LANE WOODS
SMALLBROOK MEADOW
WARMINSTER
DUNSCOMBE BOTTOM
LANGFORD LAKES
THE DEVENISH
COCKEY DOWN
OYSTERS COPPICE
MIDDLETON DOWN
SALISBURY
BLACKMOOR COPSE
COOMBE BISSETT DOWN
LANDFORD BOG
This map is intended as a guide only and is not to scale

June

Roe deer and roses, and wild colour

In June, our wonderful orchids take centre stage.

June is the ideal month to find orchids in flower. Take a trip to ***Dunscombe Bottom***, ***Morgan's Hill or Middleton Down*** for spotted, pyramidal, fragrant and bee orchids. Fluttering closely over the grasses, the five-spot burnet moth adds yet more colour to these landscapes.

Wait patiently and you may come across a roe deer fawn hidden in the grassy glades and margins of ***Blackmoor Copse*** or ***Green Lane Wood***.

Stick your nose into a wild rose and breathe in the scent of summer, before heading to a nearby river or pond to see how many ducklings you can spot.

Did you know?

The bee orchid gets its name from its main pollinator – a species of bee – which is thought to have driven the evolution of the flowers.

PHOTO BY JOHN RATYTRAY

PHOTO BY PETE BLANCHARD

PHOTO BY DARIN SMITH

PHOTO BY STEPHEN DAVIES

Dunscombe Bottom

July

Darting dragons, elusive emperors

A wonderful month for beautiful butterflies.

Silver washed fritillary, white admiral and purple hairstreak butterflies can be found flying above the glades at ***Ravensroost Wood*** and ***Clouts Wood***, as well as many of our other woodland reserves. ***Blackmoor Copse*** presents the elusive purple emperor butterfly. On the chalk downland of ***Middleton Down*** and ***Cockey Down***, marbled white and ringlet butterflies dance through the grasses. This is an ideal time to practice your macro photography!

Hawker and darter dragonflies reach their peak during July. Take time to sit by one of the ponds at ***Lower Moor***, or near the river at ***Smallbrook Meadows***, to watch them dart around.

PHOTO BY STEVE DAY

PHOTO BY STEPHEN DAVIES

Ravensroost Wood

August

A last relaxing stop for summer visitors

See wading birds before they head to warmer climes.

Summer visiting wading birds begin their journey south in August, and can often be found at ***Langford Lakes***. One example is the common sandpiper.

On the edge of the pools of water at ***Landford Bog***, our only nature reserve in the New Forest National Park, you will find the spectacularly large raft spider.

The second generation of beautiful Adonis blue butterfly emerges in August on the chalk downlands at ***Coombe Bissett Down***, ***Morgan's Hill*** and ***Cockey Down***, perfect locations to look out for the ping of a grasshopper or cricket in the grass.

PHOTO BY DARIN SMITH

Coombe Bissett Down

September

Catch a flash of an elusive fisher

Autumn plants begin to emerge on our reserves.

Autumn gentian plants emerge on the slopes of our chalk downland reserves this month, with ***Coombe Bissett Down*** being a great place to find them. Over at ***Clouts Wood***, meadow saffron with its delicate pink crocus-like flowers can be spotted.

September is a great time to watch for kingfishers, as they are usually at their highest numbers around this time of year. Take a stroll at ***Langford Lakes***, or ***Smallbrook Meadows***, or sit in one of the bird hides at ***Lower Moor*** and listen out for the loud 'pip' call, followed by a flash of turquoise.

Did you know?

There are about 90 species of kingfisher around the world, most of which have brightly coloured feathers.

KINGFISHER PHOTO BY DARIN SMITH

PHOTO BY RYAN TABOR

Mallard Lake, Lower Moor

Autumn Transition

The golden earthy colour of change

Preparing for the colder months ahead.

As the temperatures begin to fall, nature has its own way of preparing for the winter months that lie ahead. Leaves start to change from the vibrant greens to rich oranges, yellows and reds, and fall in the autumn winds.

On the woodland floor, fungi emerge to help decay the fallen leaf litter. Animals, such as hedgehogs, start gathering leaves and twigs to begin their hibernation.

Autumn is a great time of year to grab your camera, don your wellies and take a nature walk.

PHOTO BY EMMA KIRKUP

PHOTO BY OWAIN SHAW

Winter Transition

Stark lands reveal hidden beauty

Far from bleak, winter sees the start of nature's revival.

The bare branches of the trees make it easier to see the birds that are active over the winter months. Winter can be a great time of year to spot birds of prey, including barn owls, short-eared owls and kestrels on the hunt for rodents. The wetland reserves become a haven for wading birds, and hedgerows come alive with winter flocks of fieldfares, redwings and possibly even waxwings.

Put out a bird feeder to help the birds over the winter, or head to Langford Lakes or Lower Moor nature reserves and observe the birds making frequent visits to the feeding stations.

During late winter, life begins to emerge again with the carpets of snowdrops in woodlands and, often, in churchyards. Hibernators, such as the brimstone butterfly, emerge on the warmer days and frogs begin to spawn in ponds, lakes and ditches.

PHOTO BY OWAIN SHAW

October

Soak up trees rich in colour

Our reserves reflect the changing seasons.

October is, of course, a perfect time to take in the changing colours of the leaves at our woodland reserves. ***The Devenish*** is a great reserve to head to, where you can soak up the rich colours of the trees found not only in the reserve, but in the wider Woodford Valley. October is also an important month for fungi. ***Green Lane Wood*** and ***Clouts Wood*** are ideal locations for fungi spotting, however, you will also spot it in any reserve that has decaying woodland and leaf litter.

The late flowering purple Devil's-bit scabious is also in bloom at ***Coombe Bissett Down***, the food source for the marsh fritillary butterfly larvae.

Surprisingly, dragonflies can still be active on sunny days in October, and the ponds at ***Lower Moor*** are an ideal place to find them.

PHOTO BY EMMA KIRKUP

The Devenish

November

A time for lapwings and brown trout

The world is turning colder but there is much to enjoy.

Traditionally a quieter month for wildlife as the weather begins to turn colder, November is, however, a great time to find sweet chestnuts fallen in their prickly cases in the woodlands. The bird that features in Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's logo, the lapwing, visits damp meadows and wetlands during November. You can often spot flocks of them at ***Langford Lakes***. November is also the time of year when brown trout begin to spawn in the clear gravel reaches of chalk steams. They can be found in the River Wylye at ***Langford Lakes***.

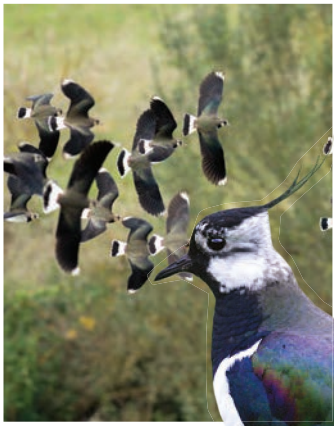

PHOTO BY DARIN SMITH

PHOTO BY PETER HAYES

PHOTO BY RALPH HARVEY

Langford Lakes

December

Spotting otters on a brisk winter walk

Robins aren't the only stars of the festive season.

The festive period can be both busy and indulgent, so why not take some time out in one of our nature reserves: perfect for a brisk winter walk!

December is a good time of year to look out for otters. Often elusive, they are easier to find now as the vegetation on the river bank dies back. ***Lower Moor*** and ***Langford Lakes*** are two such reserves.

Barn owls hunt over rough grassland before dusk on calm winter days. You may be lucky enough to spot them at ***Blakehill Farm*** or ***Echo Lodge Meadows***.

And, of course, what better way to feel festive than to take some time spotting robins, holly, ivy and mistletoe!

PHOTOS BY DARIN SMITH

Lower Moor

Join us

Be part of a growing movement

A special offer for readers of *Wiltshire Life*.

Would you like to be part of a growing movement to protect nature across the UK and in our county? Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is offering a 50% reduction on annual membership to *Wiltshire Life* readers.

You can choose from individual, joint or family membership, and there are a host of great benefits, including:

- A Nature Reserves Guide, exclusively for members, introducing a world of wildlife just waiting to be explored.
- A twice-yearly What's On guide with events, talks and walks for you to enjoy.
- Twice a year, a copy of *Wiltshire Wildlife* magazine – packed with news and fascinating articles about wildlife, activities on nature reserves and green living.
- The Trust's annual report and an invitation to its Annual General Meeting.
- A Wiltshire Wildlife Trust car sticker.

In order to receive your discount

Visit **www.wiltshirewildlife.org/joinus**
and enter discount code – **WILTSHIRELIFE**

Alternatively, call 01380 725670 or email membership@wiltshirewildlife.org for help in setting up your membership.

WORKING TOGETHER WITH WILTSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST

We're not just about providing water services.

We believe in helping everyone and our environment so we're supporting local groups by volunteering and bringing communities together.

Find out more about how we support your area at:
wessexwater.co.uk/about-us/community

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