



Wildlife News from Rushcliffe March 2024

March is the start of meteorological Spring, a time of reawakening for nature, but sometimes with the risk of cold weather and even snow, if the Polar Vortex misbehaves. As the days grow longer and, hopefully, the temperature rises, our flora and fauna change with the season.

Read our guide 'What to look out for in March' by following this [link](#).

GET CLOSER TO NATURE THROUGH ORGANISED EVENTS

Sat 23rd March Gotham Hills in Spring

A walk with Gordon Dyne taking in Gotham Sandbanks and Woods then over onto the West Leake Hills and back down to Gotham (circa 4 miles).

Meet 10 am at the seat by the "Totem Pole" in Gotham (where Nottingham Road coming from Clifton direction turns sharp left by the Post Office shop). what3words = *madness sweeper directive*.

For more information, please contact gordon.dyne@gmail.com

Sat 9th March Rushcliffe Wildlife WATCH GROUP

11:00 am - 1:00 pm. Meet at Rushcliffe Country Park Visitor Centre.

For young people between 8 and 12 years old who are interested in wildlife-related activities. Meets monthly, on every second Saturday. Charge £3 per session.

DISCOVER & CELEBRATE
YOUR LOCAL NATURE RESERVE WITH
'FRIENDS OF THE HOOK'

'THE HOOK' DISCOVERY DAY

AT ALL HALLOWS CHURCH HALL
23 PIERREPONT RD, NG2 5BP

**SATURDAY 16 MARCH
2024 11-4PM**

Photo displays | Information stalls
Arts & crafts activities
Animal encounters | Refreshments

FREE DROP IN EVENT

Friends of The Hook
Rushcliffe Environmental Group
of the Year 2024
friendsofthehook@gmail.com
friendsofthehook.org.uk

DISCOVER
'THE HOOK NATURE RESERVE'

...its History | Birds & butterflies
Wildflower meadows | Orchard & pond
Increasing biodiversity | Woodlands

Art & crafts
Animal mask making
Art card printing

Get up close to Hook wildlife
with taxidermy specimens from
Nottingham City Museums

Also... Lady Bay Hedgehog Highway
Lady Bay Birdwatchers
Nature friendly gardening

Friends of The Hook

Visit our website at www.southnottswildlife.org.uk

Follow us on Facebook at [Southnottswildlife](https://www.facebook.com/Southnottswildlife)

Email: southnottswildlife@gmail.com



WINTER WILDLIFE TALKS PROGRAMME

Thursday March 7th: The Plight of the Humblebee! - Louise Bentley, Lancashire Wildlife Trust



The fascinating world of bees! Prepare to be humbled at their industrious and gentle nature, intelligence and sense of community. It's not all about the Honeybee or even the cute Bumblebee, as the UK is home to a wide range of overlooked but no less important Solitary Bees. But why do we need them and how can we help keep them buzzing and save the sound of summer? Join us to find out what you can do to help save our pollinators.

Louise has been volunteering for Lancashire Wildlife Trust since 2011, with a particular interest in habitat creation and saving species. In 2016 she set up Bolton and Bury Swifts, and advocates for nest places for Swifts and Martins, and encourages protection of their colonies. She is also an RSPCA-accredited rehabber for grounded Swifts and Hirundines.

The talk will be available online through Zoom, and costs £4 per device (including booking fee). To book, please follow this [link](#) (which also provides details of technical requirements and the remaining talks in the Programme).

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The South Notts Local Group Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday 25th April, starting at 7.00 pm. The meeting will be on line, via Zoom, and will be followed by a free talk at 7.30 pm. Fuller details will be available shortly.

BARN OWLS – A SUCCESS STORY





In the 11 February edition of *The Sunday Times* one article by Hugo Daniel in particular stood out from the usual mix of economic, political and global woes and horrors: *The success story behind Britain's barn owl boom*.

It centred around Colin Shawyer, a Hertfordshire biochemist, whose teenage love of barn owls led to a lifelong mission to protect the birds.

In the 1930s there were thought to be around 12,000 breeding pairs of barn owls in England and Wales, with substantial decline in the previous 30-40 years; by 1987 Shawyers found the number had crashed to around 4,000 pairs, as a result of changing agricultural practices, habitat destruction and falling numbers of prey. Some experts feared that the species was heading for extinction.

Project Barn Owl, organised jointly by BTO and Hawk and Owl Trust and carried out during 1995-97, estimated 4,000 pairs in the UK, Isle of Man and Channel Islands (source: *British Trust for Ornithology*).

In 1988 the Shawyers set up the Barn Owl Conservation Network, "... making it his mission to save the species. Over three decades the network has mobilised volunteers, landowners and farmers to help." Their efforts, alongside the work of other wildlife organisations and conservation groups, have clearly worked: in 2015 the bird was moved from amber alert to green on the UK's "birds of conservation concern" list and the population has continued to grow.

According to Hugo Daniel "Shawyer, the Barn Owl Trust and the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) have studied nests and chicks and believe they are in good health. Mike Toms, of the BTO, co-ordinator of the previous national barn owl survey, said: 'No one doubts the population has increased. It is possible that the population could now number as many as 14,000 pairs. Although their status has improved markedly there are still challenges ahead as changes in the climate may have negative impacts.'"

One of the key enablers has been the provision of artificial nest boxes to replace the old barns and trees that were once their natural homes, but now long gone. According to the article "Over the years he (Colin Shawyer) has put up 4,500 nest boxes" and "he estimates that 75 per cent of the barn owl population are in man-made nests".

Here in Rushcliffe, we are privileged to have a group that has played a leading role in this nationwide success: The Rushcliffe Barn Owl Group. Founded in 1996 by Clive James, its aims are to conserve and increase the population of Barn Owls in Rushcliffe, partly by "Providing artificial breeding sites in suitable locations."

Their website tells us that by 2000 they had installed 50 boxes, and to date have installed a total of 170 boxes around the area, contributing to an impressive breeding record: the 1000th chick was ringed in 2016.



Maintaining a nest box, and chicks awaiting ringing and recording (Courtesy Rushcliffe Barn Owl Group)

The picture for Barn Owls across the county is similar. In 2000, 19 breeding pairs were recorded. In 2021, 111 breeding pairs were recorded, with a fantastic 316 chicks (*source: Howard Broughton Notts Birdwatchers*). Within those 21 years there were good and bad years, reflecting just how sensitive the owls are to bad weather and/or years in which their food sources – in particular voles - are themselves reduced in number. The good news though, is that the trends for both breeding pairs and chicks raised are positive

You can find out more about this wonderful work at the Group's website [here](#). You can also follow the activities of Howard Broughton and friends on the Group's Facebook page [here](#) as they install and maintain boxes and ring chicks.

A GLIMMER OF HOPE FOR HEDGEHOG NUMBERS?



In February 2022, the Natural History Museum reported that "Up to three quarters of all of Britain's rural hedgehogs have been lost in the past 20 years. While rural hedgehogs have experienced a sharp decline, their urban counterparts appear to have a stable population, and may potentially be growing in number." (*Image: Wikipedia*)

Analysis from [The State of Britain's Hedgehogs 2022](#), an annual report released by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society and the People's Trust for Endangered Species, suggests that

countryside populations of the small mammal have declined by an average of 8.3% a year for the past two decades.



Fast forward two years to the latest annual survey of garden wildlife carried out by the readers of BBC Gardeners' World, which reports [here](#) that hedgehog sightings rose two percentage points last year; the previous survey had recorded a decline.

Almost 2,000 people took part in the magazine's survey, which found "that 33% of people said they had seen the animal in their garden in 2023, that's up from 31% in 2022. Of those taking part, it found that 21% either saw them for the first time or more often than the year before. The biggest increase in sightings of hedgehogs was in urban areas."

Kevin Smith, BBC Gardeners' World Magazine editor, said efforts to educate people about wildlife-friendly gardening were helping to "turn our gardens into the havens that hedgehogs have long enjoyed".

Faye Vass, head of The British Hedgehog Preservation Society, said the survey is "really valuable in helping us understand more about hedgehogs". She also rightly recognises the 'snapshot' nature of the survey, which may not necessarily reflect a longer-term trend – let's hope future years bring continued improvement!

The comments by both Kevin Smith ("efforts to educate people about wildlife-friendly gardening were helping to turn our gardens into the havens that hedgehogs have long enjoyed") and Faye Vass ("community action - like making gardens havens for hedgehogs, or making your garden as hedgehog-friendly as possible - is incredibly important") reflect the growth of community action to help these lovely animals, which is exemplified by Wild Things Keyworth. You can read about their efforts to help hedgehogs, and so much more, on their Facebook page [here](#).

Wild Things Keyworth are currently offering free 'gaps for hedgehogs' in existing fences, walls and gates to households in Keyworth to help hedgehogs get to the green spaces they need. Drilling will start again in earnest in March, so please do contact them to get on their 'Green List.' Email: wildthingskeyworth@gmail.com

They are also happy to offer suggestions by email to other areas and perhaps link you up with existing volunteers local to you.

DORMOUSE DETECTION DOGS...AND MICE



The Notts Dormouse Project has published its 2023 Update. To find out more, and about dormouse detector dogs, go to the Notts BAG website [here](#). (Image: Lorna Griffiths)

And sticking with a 'mouse' theme, Stuart Edmunds has produced an illustrated guide to the four species of UK mice, full of information and fascinating facts.

Click [here](#) to discover more about these delightful creatures,



BIODIVERSITY TIME CAPSULE

The Royal Agricultural University (RAU) has announced a project that should appeal to anyone with an interest in botany: a historic collection of more than 10,000 dried and pressed plant specimens, which dates back more than 200 years, is to be digitised and used to create a 'time-capsule record of biodiversity in the UK' to teach the ecology students of today and help the UK's nature recovery.

RAU says "The unique herbarium, which is now housed in the laboratories at the Royal Agricultural University (RAU), is currently all in its original delicate paper format but it is being digitally photographed, recorded, and catalogued by staff, students, and volunteers at the University with the help of funding from Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society and the University's own Cirencester Fund.

The collection is composed of around 10,000 plant specimens, dried and mounted on around 4,000 sheets, which predominantly date from between the 1820s and the 1920s with some later additions from between 1950 and 1970. The specimens are almost all UK species with many collected in and around the local Gloucestershire area. There is also an as-yet unrecorded collection of moss, algae and lichen specimens."

You can find out much more on this fascinating project [here](#).

A LEPIDOPTERAN MISCELLANY

A recent article on Butterfly Conservation's website tells us that "Light pollution threatens many nocturnal insects, including important pollinators like moths, by disrupting their ability to feed, breed and carry out their usual behaviour. But each year, light pollution increases."



Last year, the British Ecological Society reported [here](#) on a study by researchers at the University of Oulu which found that "Many insects use day length to synchronise their life cycle with the changing of seasons. Shortening late summer days, indicating the switch to autumn, trigger the transition to the overwintering state for pupa. However, light pollution can lead caterpillars to interpret the days incorrectly, causing the pupae to immediately develop into adult moths. These moths, misled by man-made light, cannot successfully reproduce in autumn or survive the winter."

Professor Thomas Merckx (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) explained "Our results are promising in the sense that light pollution is a factor of human activity that can be reduced fairly easily. Decreasing it should be a key priority in protecting insects and safeguarding our ecosystem."



Click [here](#) to discover how we can help protect moths by following some simple steps to reduce light pollution at home. To find out more about light pollution and to sign up for a free Guide to Light Pollution and Moths visit [Join the Dark Side](#).

As if, like many other animals, moths did not have enough to cope with from human activities, *The New York Times* reports that air pollution may adversely affect pollinators.



A new study by researchers at the University of Washington, published in *Science*, suggests that air pollution might make flowers less attractive to pollinating insects. They found that compounds called nitrate radicals, which can be abundant in night time urban air, severely degrade the scent emitted by the pale evening primrose, reducing visits from pollinating hawk moths.

This sensory pollution could have far-reaching effects, interfering with plant reproduction and decreasing the production of fruits that feed many species, including humans. It could also threaten pollinators, which rely on flower nectar for sustenance and are already experiencing global declines.

The researchers believe that the problem extends far beyond the hawk moth and the primrose. Many pollinators are sensitive to monoterpenes, which are common in floral odours. Using computational modelling, the researchers calculated that in many cities around the world, pollution has reduced scent-detection distances by more than 75 percent since the preindustrial age.

Please Note: I have not included links to these two articles as they are both behind paywalls.

A third piece of research reported by *The Guardian* this month, available [here](#), gives clues as to how Lepidoptera – the order of winged insects that contains butterflies and moths – have been so resilient throughout dramatic changes on Earth, and how this may help future conservation efforts.



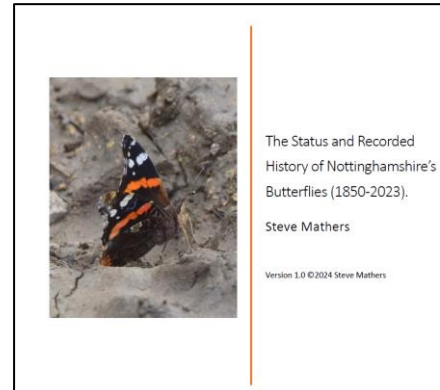
By looking at more than 200 genomes of butterflies and moths, researchers at the Wellcome Sanger Institute and University of Edinburgh traced the genetic code back to the very first butterflies and identified 32 ancestral chromosomes that are the building blocks of nearly all lepidopterans to better understand their evolutionary history.

The research team said lepidopterans were powerful indicators of ecosystem health – and that a deeper understanding of butterfly and moth biology will inform



future research on adaptation for biodiversity conservation. The full research paper can be found [here](#).

Steve Mathers, Nottinghamshire's County Recorder for Butterflies, has released a publication: 'The Status and Recorded History of Nottinghamshire's Butterflies (1850-2023)'. For more information, click [here](#) and to request a free PDF copy of this excellent document, contact Steve at smbutterflies11@gmail.com.



BEWARE – TOADS!

According to Paul Simons' Weather Eye column in *The Times* on 23 February "One of Britain's greatest natural phenomena sprang into life during the spells of mild and very wet weather as toads emerged from hibernation and waddled off at night on their annual migration to breed in ponds."



He goes on to acknowledge the role of villagers in Oxtun who, 25 years ago, persuaded their local council to close a toad migration route to traffic. Thought to be the first closure of its kind, it has since been repeated across the country, helped by Froglife's 'Toads on Roads' project, as evidenced by the number of media reports of volunteers saving toads. According to Paul Simons, "last year Froglife reported that 115,000 toads were helped to safety at more than 200 toad crossings". (Image: Kayleigh Woodhouse)

In Notts, the Nottinghamshire Amphibian and Reptile Group (NARG) rescued over 600 toads, and are asking for volunteers to help. For more details, please visit the Notts BAG website [here](#).

FARMING AND THE TRUST

Last month we looked at the use of the ancient craft of hedge laying at Rushcliffe Country Park, helping to provide valuable habitats for wildlife, so it was good to read about NWT's recent hedge laying and cover crop event with members of the County's farming community. NWT's work to engage with farmers is probably its most important strand of activity in trying to achieve significant gains for wildlife habitat, as so much of the county is farmland. On the day, the wind eventually died down sufficiently for a sharing of best practice approaches to enhancing land for wildlife as well as food production. You can read more about the Trust's work with farmers by following this [link](#).



CONNECTING WITH NATURE

Nottinghamshire in general, and Rushcliffe in particular have many wonderful sites to visit and connect with nature, even in the dark days of winter ... or, perhaps, especially in the dark days of winter!

You can find a full list of sites in Rushcliffe [here](#).

WORK PARTIES

Our local nature reserves rely on volunteers to help maintain them, and organise regular work parties. Planned parties for March are as follows:

Sat 2nd	Wilwell Farm Cutting
Sun 3rd	Grizzled Skipper – Flawborough Footpath and Triagle
Sat 9th	Wilford Claypit Meadow Park
Tue 12th	Grizzled Skipper – Grange Farm Normanton-on-Soar
Sat 23rd	Springdale Wood
Sun 24th	Sharphill Wood

Details of times, etc. can be found in the Diary section of our website [here](#), so if you have some spare time and energy please feel free to join in – you will be very welcome!

PLEASE NOTE: All of these dates and details are based on the current entries in the Diary. Could work part organisers please let me have planned dates for 2024, as and when they are available, so I can keep the entries as accurate as possible. Thank you.

And finally...

Don't forget that you can find more news, events and items of interest from SNG, Notts Wildlife Trust and other local Friends of Groups etc. by visiting our website at www.southnottswildlife.org.uk

Follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SouthNottsWildlifeGroup.

If you want to contact us please email southnottswildlife@gmail.com

Chris Overton South Notts Local Group 28th February 2024

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Visit our website at www.southnottswildlife.org.uk

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Email: southnottswildlife@gmail.com