

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Annual Report 2015

Summary for Members



Warwickshire



Warwickshire Wildlife Trust exists to achieve our vision of an environment rich in wildlife for everyone in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull. We were established in 1970 to protect our local natural heritage and encourage people to engage, enjoy and get involved with the natural environment.

Princethorpe Woodland Discovery Day at Ryton Wood, February 2015 © 2016 Lee Griffiths (WWT)

We would like to offer our warm thanks and sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed to our success in 2015 and, most of all, for helping make our region a better place to live and work.

We can be justifiably proud of what we are achieving.
Keep up the superb work and thank you for being part of it!

Thank You!

A full version of our 2015 Annual Report is available on our website;
www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/publications

Achievements and Performance in 2015

Nature Reserves

- Strategic purchase of woodland at Bubbenhall created a contiguous nature reserve over 205ha by joining Ryton and Wappenbury Woods
- Newlands Phase III project completed the creation of 20 ha of reedbed at Brandon Marsh
- A member's legacy helped purchase a new compact tractor and bailer to better manage reserves

2015 saw the Trust take a significant step forward in its mechanical prowess with the purchase of a compact tractor and bailer, with a new barn for their secure storage. Funded primarily through a legacy, and contributions from Middlemarch,

the reserves team now has better control of management on reserves and can make more efficient use of everyone's time by taking repetitive and back breaking work away from volunteers, allowing them to use their skills for more technical and hands-on purposes. With this new found freedom volunteers helped achieve 25,000 hours of surveying and management on our reserves ensuring they continue to be in the best possible condition.

The purchase of Bubbenhall Wood and Meadow has bought the Trust's tally of nature reserves up to 65 in 2015 and this strategically placed site, nestled in the Princethorpe Living Landscape area, is a vital stepping stone that connects

some of the county's largest and most precious blocks of woodland.

Work continued on the Coronation Meadows project and an additional 2,000 wild-flower plug plants were planted across Dunchurch Meadow, further enriching the site. The Millennium seed bank Tree Seed Project, also into its second year, saw our reserves selected to harvest seed to be stored for future research and use at Kew.



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Wetlands

- A Water Vole Recovery Project started once a 2 year HLF grant had been secured.

Significant progress was made in the securing of funding in September to support a 2 year Water Vole Recovery project in Nuneaton and Coventry areas, working with Environment Agency, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and Canal and River Trust to create habitat and restore hedgerows and vegetation along canal and river corridors. This will extend the suitable habitat for water voles, working from existing stronghold areas.

Further surveys for water voles were undertaken on the Oxford canal in preparation for the funding application, and on Guphill brook.

Specific wetland projects included project planning for creation of backwaters and pools at Guphill Brook, Coventry, funded by Defra. Delivery on the ground was rescheduled to spring 2016 due to flooding issues.

A county wide survey for otters was undertaken over a week at 133 sites, of which over 75% were otter positive, which is

in line with expectations given the recent gradual recovery of populations. A few mink signs were recorded on sites in the south of the County, with nothing of note near the strongholds further north.



Water Vole © 2016 Margaret Holland (WildNET)

Nature Improvement Area landscape scale project

Funded by Natural England this project finished in March 2015. Highlights over the three years since 2012 included bringing 255 ha of broadleaved woodlands into active management; restoring 6 ha of woodland; 3.5 ha new native plantation; bringing 23.5 ha lowland meadows and 13 ha of flood meadow into active management, and restoring 3

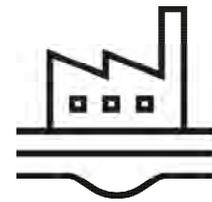
ha; 12 ponds maintained, 5 restored, and 7 created; 7.5 km of hedgerow maintained, 7 km restored and 4 km created; 1 small orchard restored. Many of the project sites were small (less than 5 ha) however each was an ecologically important stepping stone site for wildlife across the county.

Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership

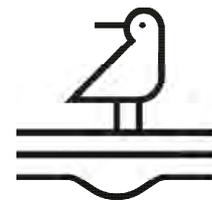
- Tame Valley Wetlands Partnership (TVWLP) engaged 4,200 people on 57 natural heritage events and training

The Heritage Lottery Funded TVWLP scheme continued with the delivery of heritage improvement and community engagement activities. A new brand, agreed by partners, was established to promote the scheme across the Tame Valley Wetlands area, which covers 104km² between Birmingham and Tamworth.

In addition to events and training the scheme also distributed £8,000 of grants to local community groups. Amongst the highlights was the restoration of the Drayton Turret Footbridge by the Canal and River Trust – an iconic 200 year old, Grade II listed structure on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal. A 1km circular riverside walk at Kingsbury Water Park was established, enabling access for all. Native wild flower seeding of the reshaped river bank was completed. Detailed feasibility work took place and permissions were secured for the delivery of two large-scale wetland and river restoration projects which will be implemented in 2016.



Tame Valley Wetlands



Tame Valley Wetlands



Tame Valley Wetlands

Princethorpe Woodlands Living Landscape

- Princethorpe Woodlands Partnership used a Heritage Lottery Funded development grant for work and surveys in support of a major application in 2016

Surveys of woodland breeding birds, bats in woodlands, woodland condition monitoring, grassland and pond surveys have been carried out on several sites, which will inform projects to be delivered in the delivery phase if the next funding submission is successful.

Access audits of seven circular proposed trails are underway, and interpretation improvement proposals have been developed. Extensive community consultation has been fulfilled with over 300 questionnaires completed, eight public consultation events and meetings held with all partners and key specific contacts.

A successful Heritage event at Brinklow Castle was held in October to engage people in re-enactment of a battle.

Trials of engagement activities were undertaken, including education sessions, youth activities and wildplay events, which were all evaluated. A detailed assessment of partner skills and requirements was done, and recommendations for training in the HLF delivery phase were written.

Planning

In 2015 the Planning Team, supported by 73 days of volunteer time, responded to six Local Authority Development Framework consultations and screened 177 planning applications. We provided input to 20 major planning cases including the design of the ecological mitigation area at Meon Vale, Long Marston to create habitat for water voles and wetland birds.

Of the 65 responses made to new planning applications, 29 recommended that a Biodiversity Impact Assessment be submitted as evidence of 'no net loss' to biodiversity. It is encouraging that there has been an increase in development applications using Biodiversity Offsetting since

its adoption in 2014, but there is still more work needed to achieve complete uptake.

The Trust submitted a second petition to the House of Commons in response to HS2 amendments made to the scheme which removed a green bridge and thus isolated a significant assemblage of bats. The petition also asked for further compensation for loss of ancient woodland.

A further six draft Neighbourhood Plans were produced in 2015 and the Trust screened these for impacts and opportunities for nature conservation. Our guidance leaflets were sent to seven new Neighbourhood Plan Groups established in 2015.

Habitat Biodiversity Audit

- For the first time the recent (i.e. less than five years old) survey of habitats covers more than half of the Warwickshire sub-region and two thirds of the sub-region has been surveyed by the HBA within the last 10 years
- Warwick District Local Plan Additional Site Options Ecological Assessment completed, avoiding and mitigating against the impact on biodiversity of proposed new developments
- 'Why are Local Wildlife Sites Important' campaign launched to raise the awareness of Warwickshire's Local Wildlife Sites in line with national efforts

A total of 45 Local Wildlife Sites were surveyed including: the **Kenilworth Greenway**, a dismantled railway site, an important community asset and a

green corridor for wildlife under threat from the proposed HS2 route; **Brueton Park** extension, an addition to the Local Nature Reserve which links to the River Blythe SSSI, itself a major wildlife corridor connecting together many species-rich semi-improved and unimproved grasslands, wetland and woodland sites; **Hartshill Castle** adjacent to the country park which continues the extension of post-industrial local wildlife sites and potential wildlife sites along the Hartshill-Atherstone Ridge in North Warwickshire creating a post-industrial living landscape of wildlife, geological and historical importance; **Portobello Orchard** and **Blackwell Bushes**, both traditional orchards in Stratford District and the first orchard sites to be designated as agreed in the Traditional Orchards Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull.

Youth Engagement

- 1,045 hours of volunteer time contributed by 11-24 year olds
- 446 hours of work experience placements provided to 14 -18 year olds.

The Heritage Lottery Funded Welcombe Hills project (A Wilde Welcombe) with Playbox Theatre and Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

created our first audio guide for a nature reserve, and held an end of project performance arts day at the reserve.

Another new initiative saw us work with Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre to run sessional activities as a pilot project with young people in maximum secure training and with pupils at

schools at risk of exclusion.

Positive interaction with nature, free from strict agendas, is an effective way to reach the most vulnerable young people in Warwickshire and the Trust continues to develop itself as a provider of these services for schools, youth groups and other youth institutions.

Health and Well Being

- Between 20% and 191% improvement in mental health for our volunteers
- Seven sites improved for wildlife
- Over 1000 volunteer hours spent on sites

This continues to be a growing area of work for the Trust, as more people begin to recognize the positive physical and mental health benefits of spending time outdoors in nature.

In Solihull the Trust has continued to build on its successful Your Wildlife Project, funded by Public Health within the Borough Council. The project, which works on a wide range of sites, has seen marked improvements in health for 80% of volunteers. One volunteer, who has been with the project since it started, reported a 191% improvement in his mental wellbeing. Over 1,000 wild flowers were planted on sites all over North Solihull creating new wildlife havens.

In Coventry the Trust has started the Go With the Flow Project which has had a good uptake of volunteers in the first few months of delivery. The project, which is funded by Coventry City Councils Public Health team, focuses on getting people from three areas in the city out and active. It has worked across a number of different sites creating mini havens for wildlife whilst getting people out and active.



© 2016 Jamie Harris (WWT)

Training

- Five trainees retained by the Trust within the Reserves and Education teams
- Ten new trainee placements across seven partners

The Wild Career Project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, completed its final year in 2015. All trainees successfully completed their placements, achieving the City and Guilds Level 2 Certificate or Diploma in

Work Based Conservation, with most going on to get jobs within the conservation and heritage sector. Five trainees from The Wild Career Project have been employed by the Trust within the Reserves and Education teams, adding new capacity and retaining their skills and knowledge.

The Wilder Career Choice, the extension to Wild Career, also funded by the Heritage Lottery

Fund, commenced with the biggest cohort of trainees to date, with ten trainees across seven partners. The Trust has also been acting as the accredited Centre for Learning for other Wildlife Trusts and organisations as well as supporting the Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership Scheme with its trainee programme.

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Education

- A total number of 12,557 children took part in education activities
- 174 holiday activities delivered across our two sites.
- 99 different schools visited us for their school trip.

2015 was another busy year for education. The team delivered a successful Children in Need Project in North Solihull working with children from very deprived backgrounds in outdoor

education. In addition we ran sessions at children's centres in Coventry over the school holidays. The style of project we delivered was extremely well received by the funders. This new model, including after school clubs, allowed more funding to be secured for 2016.

The education team also delivered school trips, parties and uniformed groups' sessions. Western Power Distribution funded schools which would not normally visit so we were able

to engage with new schools too. Some of these schools have already rebooked for 2016.

Wildlife themed birthday parties and nature tots sessions have also become more and more popular at both visitor centres. Through word of mouth more and more people are finding out about what we do and we are seeing more new families come to Trust events for the first time. We successfully delivered 141 parties across both our sites and delivered 145 toddler sessions.

Volunteers

- More than 38,963 volunteer hours were donated to help the Trust in 2015
- Donated time equivalent to an additional 20 full time members of staff

Once again, our 1,014 volunteers stepped up to the cause and generously volunteered a magnificent 39,000 hours to the Trust! Support at this level benefits both individual teams of staff, the organisation as a whole and the individuals involved who gain a huge amount from volunteering: it was a staggering 7,540 hours more than in 2014!

New volunteer roles were created for those wanting to support the Trust with an emphasis on providing more varied opportunities to suit differing abilities and availability.

In a first for reserves, an administrative volunteer was recruited to assist with the day-to-day running of matters and has since proved an invaluable asset to the team.

The Go With the Flow Project, which seeks to provide opportunities for people wanting to become more physically active started delivering sessions in

November and has since proved hugely beneficial for all involved.

Work to support our wonderful team of work party leaders and volunteers continued with a review of procedures applicable to volunteering in practical conservation. We currently have 16 groups working across 18 sites, with the addition of two new groups in the pipeline, which includes five new leaders.

We continue to offer training and guidance to these groups who help to maintain some of Warwickshire's wildest places!



Brandon Marsh Conservation Volunteers and volunteers from Keller working on Newlands Reedbed at Brandon Marsh © 2016 Steven Cheshire (WWT)

Community Work

- Solihull Hedgehog Improvement Area launched
- 33 hedgehog talks delivered
- £58,000 secured through the British Hedgehog Preservation Society to continue the Solihull Hedgehog Improvement Area and initiate the Rugby Hedgehog Improvement Area across 2016

The Solihull Hedgehog Improvement Area was launched in March 2015 with the aim of engaging local people in

hedgehog conservation and promoting action to improve the landscape for hedgehogs.

Throughout 2015 the project made appearances at a total of 75 varied events including hedgehog talks given to adult groups, a habitat management workshop delivered to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and four events held to train residents to conduct hedgehog surveys. The project made 27 visits to primary schools in the borough and delivered survey training to 15 of those primary schools. Areas of urban

green space were also surveyed with all of the 3,960 front gardens in the ward of Elmdon being surveyed to assess easily accessible foraging space for hedgehogs. Throughout the year a total of 142 hedgehog sightings were recorded within Solihull by public submission of sightings and active surveys conducted as part of the project. Finally, due to the success of the year the project was expanded to start planning Rugby as the second Hedgehog Improvement Area in the county.

Visitor Centres

- 23,845 people visited Brandon Marsh Nature Centre in 2015
- Improvements have been made to both our Visitor Centres including new entrance signage, maps and display boards.

The shop at Brandon Marsh Nature Centre has an improved stock range with more branded products made locally for the Trust, including beers from two local breweries, and wildlife

shaped chocolates. This has resulted in increased sales and excellent feedback. The tearooms there and at Parkridge continue to be a valuable source of income for the visitor centres.

At Parkridge a new wildlife garden has been developed and increased membership team activity will hopefully result in recruiting more members. New signage has also been installed, highlighting that the Centre is run by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust,

as well a map to show other reserves.

At Brandon Marsh, with considerable help from the Warwickshire Geological Conservation Group, a wall was built using a variety of local stone to illustrate the different rocks in our area over time. Interpretation boards will be installed in 2016. New signage has been installed to improve the look of the centre.

Membership

- The Trust had 22,669 members and 9,849 subscriptions in December 2015 – thank you!
- Membership income increased by 2%
- Retention rate up by 0.5%

Corporate membership stands at 31 businesses. As well as providing income through subscriptions many of our corporate members also contributed to conservation activities on reserves through volunteering time as well as

providing donations for materials. Businesses have been hugely supportive with donations and raffle prizes as well as sponsorship of school visits to Brandon Marsh.

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Fundraising

- £864,227 of new grant income secured in 2015
- 740 individual members and local residents responded to an appeal which raised £42,862 towards the purchase of Bubbenhall Wood and Meadow
- £82,110 was left to the Trust through gifts in wills

Developing links with local Round Tables and Lions has led to new

opportunities for both fundraising and raising the profile of the Trust through attendance at events such as Coventry Fun Run.

We continued to raise funds for the Badger Vaccination appeal, for Peregrine Watch, and for Help for Hedgehogs Campaign.

Pin badges continue to raise both funds and awareness and additional income was raised through recycling schemes such

as Stamps 'n' All and GiveaCar, raffles and donations.

The Trust is very grateful to the following people who remembered local wildlife and gave a lasting gift in their wills this year:

Eileen Ruth Munns - £30,191
Joan Elizabeth Graves - £33,432
Margaret Marie Kirk - £100
Philip Aaron Pain - £17,386
Valerie Richardson - £1,000

Communications

- 6% increase in sessions by website users
- 20% increase in Twitter followers and 28% increase in Facebook followers
- 18% of new members join via the Trust website

Email bulletins now go out monthly to 4,404 registered subscribers and this year we have started sending an e-bulletin to business members which has been positively received.

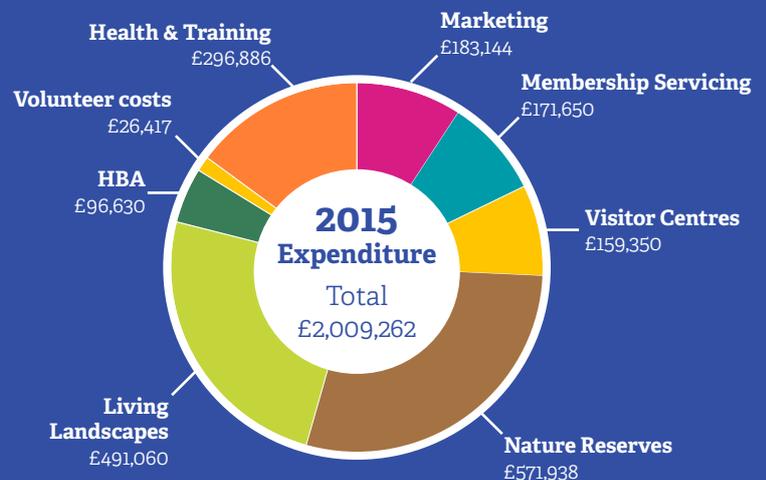
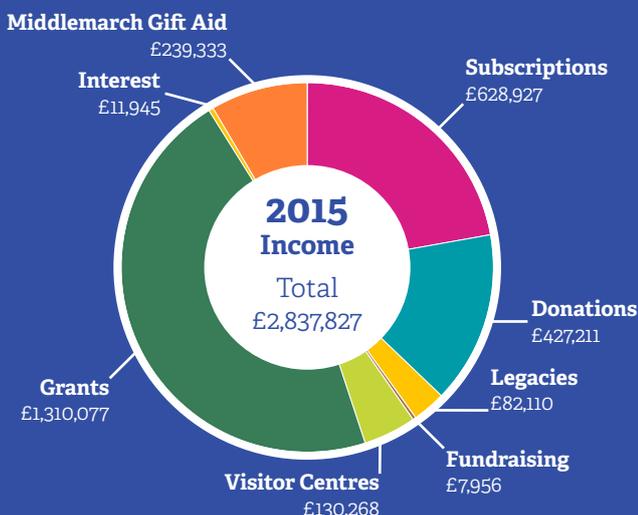
The number of visits to our website continues to rise with a 6% increase in sessions by website users. We are building our local profile with a 16% rise in Coventry, 42% in Solihull and 32% rise in Rugby. We have sent out 16 press releases.

Our social media presence continued to grow, with a 20% increase in Twitter followers to 7,694 followers and a 28% increase in Facebook page likes to 2,511 likes, both driving traffic to the website. Devoting more

time to social media channels has led to an increase in the number of followers engaging with the Trust on a daily basis, sending in enquiries and wildlife questions, and sharing the Trust's content with others. We continue to showcase the wide variety of work going on at the Trust through our blog, and for the general public to share that work with others via social media.

It is good to see that 18% of new members now join via the Trust website.

Finance



A full version of our 2015 Annual Report is available on our website;
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