



Action for Biodiversity

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**NEW publication(s):**

The Environment in your pocket 2003 (Defra 2003)

**Contact details:**

Michelle Edwards  
Biodiversity Manager  
c/o The Wildlife Trust  
Priory Country Park  
Visitor's Centre  
Barkers Lane  
Bedford  
MK41 9SH

Tel: (01234) 362776  
Fax: (01234) 328520  
Email:

michelle.edwards@wildlifebcnp.org

Working for wildlife and our quality of life

# Beds *BioNews*

Issue 1

March 2004

## Welcome to Beds *BioNews*

Welcome to the first edition of **Beds *BioNews***. This is a newsletter for people in Bedfordshire and Luton who have an interest in biodiversity, the wealth of wildlife around us. It is produced by Bedfordshire and Luton Wildlife Working Group who steer the biodiversity action planning process and would like to keep you up to date periodically about progress

being made with the Biodiversity Action Plan and Local Record Centre. Issued twice a year in March and September it is an excellent opportunity to make contact with the 200 or so organisations and individuals that form the County biodiversity partnership and let them know what you have been doing for people and wildlife. We hope that you find the

newsletters of interest and encourage you to send in anything you would like us to include in future editions. You can contact us at the address below with any articles, comments or suggestions. We look forward to hearing from you in future.

Michelle Edwards (Editor)

Copy deadline for next issue is 1st September 2004

## 'Breathing Spaces'

### SUCCESSFUL 'GREEN' BID BRINGS £MILLIONS FOR THE MARSTON VALE

Over £2.5 million has been secured for new 'green space' projects across the Forest of Marston Vale, following a successful bid by the Marston Vale Trust.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) announced in January that £2.664 million will be made available from its Sustainable Communities 'Greenspaces Fund' to implement a radical programme of environmental and landscape improvements in the Vale, that will enable local communities to have access to the countryside and natural areas, and continue the long-term strategic creation

of the Forest of Marston Vale. The Award follows a visit by Jeff Rooker, Minister of State for Regeneration and Regional Development, to the Vale to see successful Community Forest projects already well underway near Wootton and Cranfield.

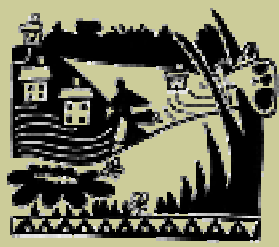
The Minister witnessed how the

Forest Team are delivering significant environmental gains for growing communities, creating new well-wooded green spaces that deliver biodiversity, landscape, public access, and amenity benefits in an integrated way. Following his visit, the Minister allocated £10m for a 'Greenspaces Fund' from the £1.64m main Growth Areas infrastructure fund to encourage delivery of 'green infrastructure', such as that being created in the Forest of Marston Vale. Of this £10m fund, Bedfordshire has managed to secure over £4m for strategic environmental projects – over £2.5m investment in creating the Forest of Marston Vale and £1.5m awarded to Bedfordshire County Council for the Luton/Dunstable area. Wild and natural places that are accessible to everyone are as important for our quality of life as the design of the buildings in which we live and work. The Marston Vale has long been identified as a strategic growth corridor for development, indeed this is partly the reason why the Marston Vale was selected to be one of the 12 Community Forests established across England by



Oak

central Government. However, our aim is to ensure that the development that takes place in the Vale benefits the environment and the people that live and work in the area. The support and funds from ODPM now enable the Forest Team to accelerate the creation of new, green 'breathing spaces' for a growing local population. Creating well-wooded greenspace close to major new developments will provide valuable areas for people and wildlife to enjoy, and also help relieve pressure on the valuable and vulnerable remnants of our ancient woodland. The ODPM funds will enable the Forest Team to deliver projects with a total value of £7.4m over the next few years – significantly boosting the long-term aim to create 30% woodland cover in the Forest as part of wider environmental regeneration and



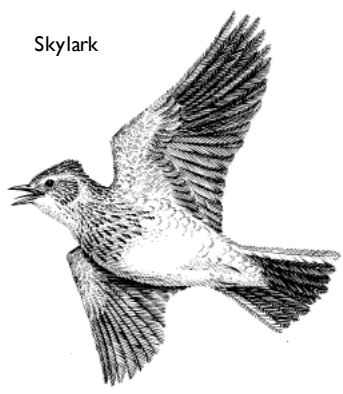
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sustainable development. The creation of the Forest of Marston Vale is a long-term, strategic initiative, and whilst there is still a long way to go to reach our target, this award shows what can be achieved to benefit both people and wildlife by working in partnership.

For more information contact James Russell Forest of Marston Vale Tel (01 234) 767 037

Skylark



IMPROVING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Dunstable Downs A partnership led by Bedfordshire County Council and the National Trust has been awarded £1.5m by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to improve facilities at Dunstable Downs. This chalk downland site already receives around half a million visitors a year, which puts pressure on the fragile chalk downland habitat, and

these numbers are set to rise. The funding will go towards a new visitor centre and additional open space. This will reduce visitor pressure in the most fragile areas, provide a focus for educational use, and help raise awareness of biodiversity, conservation and land management issues. The new centre will include interpretation, a shop and café. Revenue generated will go straight back to helping conserve and enhance the site. Easy access trails will make the site accessible to people of all abilities. Design and development work is underway, and final designs will be agreed with users, the local community and environmental groups.

For more information contact Clive Beckett Bedfordshire County Council Tel (01 234) 363 222

Stockgrove Country Park Some years ago the Visitor's Centre at Stockgrove Country Park was let as a restaurant in order to increase the funding for maintaining the Park. This severely restricted the use of the Centre for education and awareness raising, both for school parties and volunteers. This was before the Greensand Trust took over the Ranger Service and it has always been our stated intention to reclaim the space for its original purpose.

The departure of the restaurant concessionaire brought forward that opportunity and coincided with the offer of a grant from the ODPM to improve the visitor facilities at the Park. There was a catch – the money had to be spent by 31st March 2004. So we are putting in place new indoor toilets, revamping the kitchen, new interpretation, new signage and upgrading the rangers' accommodation and equipment. We do of course have a dilemma at Stockgrove. It receives in excess of 400,000 visits per annum and it is situated at the heart of one of the richest wildlife areas in the region. We do not want to increase the number of visitors – in fact of course we ideally would like a decrease. So the cunning plan is to improve the facilities for visitors, give them a better experience, raise awareness about the fantastic wildlife but reduce the number of people visiting the Park. The proposed increases in house building in the area makes this strategy even more important. So it is vitally important that alongside these visitor improvements there are a range of new open spaces in the area that will take the pressure off Stockgrove and its surroundings. For more information contact Richard Woolnough The Greensand Trust Tel (01 234) 743 666

Knotty problems

Japanese knotweed is one of the best known "problem plants". The species, introduced from the far east in the 19th century has found the climate ideal and has dramatically changed the character of some areas. It is now illegal to introduce the plant to the wild in Britain. Many other non native species have found this country to their liking. Most are benign but occasionally they can cause problems in our native habitats and in Bedfordshire conservation managers regularly wrestle with problems caused by muntjac, signal crayfish, grey squirrels and a whole raft of invasive pond plants. A comprehensive review of the issues has been

produced and the government has published proposals to try to get a grip on the problem. The proposals rely heavily on risk assessments, codes of conduct and volunteer recording efforts. The Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group has expressed reservations about the likely effectiveness of this approach.

For further details of the proposals visit www.defra.gov.uk

John Comont Bedfordshire County Council

## Surveying for Otters

The fourth Bedfordshire Otter survey has been carried out as part of the Bedfordshire Wet Woodland Project. This is a partnership project that is identifying opportunities to promote wet woodland habitats.

A total of 79 sites were surveyed, 63 of which were common to both this and the survey carried out in 1996/7. Since the last survey there has been a spread in the distribution of the otter. Signs of otters were found at 30 of the survey sites. Comparing the 63 sites common to both surveys there has been an increase in positive sites from 18 (28.7%) in 1996/7 to 26 (41.3%) in 2003/4.

This survey represents a significant contribution to the delivery of the County's Species Action Plan for Otter.

☎ For further information contact  
Amanda Proud  
Ivel & Ouse Countryside Project  
Tel (01767) 626326

## The Totternhoe Initiative

The area between Dunstable and Totternhoe is rich in biodiversity, heritage and has a high value in landscape terms. The potential for contributing to biodiversity targets for lowland calcareous grassland and helping species such as Duke of Burgundy and Small blue butterflies and Man orchid is significant. Unfortunately, little positive management for wildlife takes place. Neglect, off-road vehicles and the burning of stolen cars have damaged existing habitat. The area will also be under increasing pressure as more housing is built on the edge on Dunstable.

Following the purchase of 20 acres of Totternhoe Quarry last year by the Wildlife Trust, and with help from Bedfordshire County Council, the Trust is updating the 'Totternhoe Initiative' an action plan for the area that will help address the issues above.

The Trust has a vision of linking, enlarging and managing the stepping-stones of wildlife habitat in the Totternhoe area by purchase and management agreement. A core area of around 300 acres could be managed to protect and enhance its nature conservation and heritage value, surrounded by land managed in an integrated way for wildlife, heritage, recreation and agriculture. The new plan will address these opportunities and encourage a wide variety of organisations and individuals to help make the vision a reality.

Graham Bellamy  
Wildlife Trust



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## Mr Toad to get lovely new home

Mr Toad needs a new home and the RSPB at The Lodge, Sandy, is leaping to his rescue! The society's 1960's Lake is fast disappearing as trees and scrub smother its pools, ripping through

liners and lowering water levels.

And this is the perfect chance to bring in the diggers to create a haven for the rare natterjack toads that live on the nature reserve and its wild birds, butterflies and insects. Damaging birch, willow, sycamores and alders will be removed during March and four concrete-lined pools, ideal for natterjack toads, will be created.

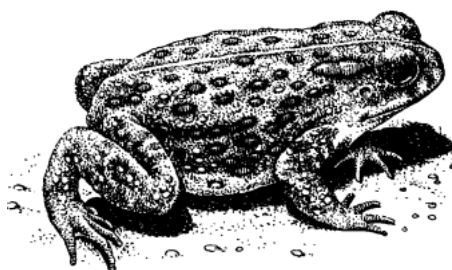
One pool will be in front of the reserve's bird-watching hide, making this a great place to see

feeding birds, dragonflies and breeding natterjack toads in summer.

The RMC Environment Fund is supporting this and other work at The Lodge nature reserve with a grant of almost £50,000 for the benefit of wildlife and our visitors. The Lake area will be transformed into a more appropriate site for the Greensand Ridge, somewhere for natterjack toads to breed and a great place to enjoy heathland wildlife.

☎ For further information contact  
Graham Wilton-Jones Tel (01767) 680551  
or Neil Renwick Tel 07739 921459

RSPB



Natterjack toad

### FACT FILE:

- There are only around 4000 individuals at 59 sites in the UK;
- Natterjack's are smaller than common toads at only 7cm long;
- They have a distinctive yellow stripe down their back;
- Mating calls can be heard over one kilometre away;
- They chase their prey such as insects, worms, slugs at night;
- Not many natterjack toads survive today because their favoured grassland homes have been lost to agriculture, forestry and building.

## Damsons in Distress!

The area around Totternhoe, Eaton Bray and Edlesborough was once famed for its extensive orchards growing a variety of damson, also known locally as prunes or plums. The orchards are now fragmented by land use changes such as farming and housing and many of the trees are now showing signs of age with fallen and broken branches, and crowns.

A project is being developed, hopefully to be funded by the Local Heritage Initiative (LHI), to raise awareness of the remaining orchards and include the management and conservation of existing tree stock (pruning and grafting), advice to landowners, awareness raising, and education, heritage, collecting people's memories and community involvement.

There is great potential for this project as so many strands are woven through it, for instance did you know that the skins of the damsons were used to make the blue-grey dye for RAF uniforms during WWII and in

the Luton hat trade. The pulp was used to make jams and preserves whilst Aylesbury ducks and geese were grazed underneath the trees and used for their meat and eggs;

what a fantastic use of the resource!

Much interest has been shown already in the project by landowners, Parish Councils, local people, the East of England Apples and Orchards Project and P3 groups – a presentation to Eaton Bray Parish Council is due to take place in early March with a view to putting together a steering group and bid for funding.

I would be interested to hear from anyone who has any further information regarding the orchards of the area.

Watch this space!

Steve Halton

North Chilterns Trust

Tel (01582) 511802

[steve.halton@northchilternstrust.co.uk](mailto:steve.halton@northchilternstrust.co.uk)



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## Wildlife on your doorstep

You should find enclosed with this newsletter your complimentary set of biodiversity postcards.

A postcard for each broad habitat type present in the Bedfordshire and Luton has been produced to show the variety of wildlife that can be found on our doorstep. Examples of places to visit can be found on the rear along with space to write your own message to send to someone you know.

Please contact us at the address over leaf if you have any articles or events you would like us to include in future editions or  
If you would like to receive this newsletter by email.

## Regional round up

A leaflet detailing the Regional Habitat Targets for the East of England is being published by the East of England Biodiversity Forum, a group of organisations who are 'working together to promote the conservation and enhancement of the wealth of wildlife within the East of England'. Aimed at decision makers, environmental organisations, landowners & managers, and others with an interest in delivering biodiversity in the region, the targets will influence policy and delivery for the region.

☛ For further information visit

[www.eastspace.net/biodiversity](http://www.eastspace.net/biodiversity)

## Forthcoming events...

### **Bedford River Festival 3rd & 4th July 04**

The Bedford River Festival held every 2 years since 1978 is due to take place in 2004. Cited as the largest single event staged in the region it is thought to attract over 200,000 people. A wide range of live entertainment, a circus, river events, carnival, parade, funfair, and a wide selection of trade, catering and charity stalls are planned.

### **National Science Week starts 12th March 04**

A programme of events across the Country. For more information ☎ 020 7019 4941

☛ [www.the-ba.net/nsw](http://www.the-ba.net/nsw)

**Beds BioNews is produced in March and September each year by Bedfordshire & Luton Wildlife**

**Working Group. It aims to keep people up to date with progress on the biodiversity action plan and local record centre.**

Picture(s) courtesy of  
English Nature