



Beds BioNews



BedsLife
Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Partnership



The Nude Ewe: making money for meadows!

Attention knitters! Now you can knit up a piece of Bedfordshire while helping to conserve our meadow and grassland habitats! The Nude Ewe is selling knitting wool spun from a local flock of Hebridean sheep. This pilot project is aiming to make conservation grazing more economically viable for local graziers.

Sheep and other livestock are needed to eat the bramble, shrubs and rough vegetation that would otherwise turn our lovely hillsides and fields to scrub. But sheep have to be shorn, and shearing costs about a pound per sheep. The fleece is worth only pennies, so graziers lose money. The Nude Ewe is attempting to turn the waste fleece into a marketable product.



The freshly-shorn Pegsdon flock. Photo by Heather Webb

Nude Ewe 'Heb' is 100% pure wool from the Hebridean flock at Pegsdon Hills Nature Reserve, and is available for £3.50 per ball. Every Nude Ewe customer will receive a free 'Bedfordshire scarf' pattern. Proceeds from the sales go to the Wildlife Trust's grazing project. If successful we hope to open the project to other graziers.

So support our local graziers and help them keep our countryside beautiful! Visit www.bedslife.org.uk/nude-ewe for more information or to place an order.

GrantScape supporting nature conservation in Bedfordshire

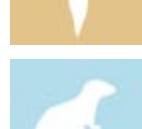
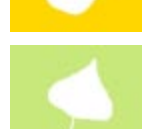
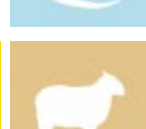
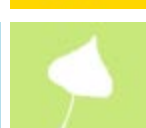
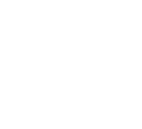
By Andrew Budd

GrantScape, the national environmental grant-making charity based in Bedfordshire, will soon be launching a special grant programme to support nature conservation projects here in our county! This initiative is supported by Bedfordshire County Council and BedsLife.

GrantScape is looking for additional funders and/or sponsors to increase the fund and maximise the number of conservation projects that can be supported.

Over the last three years, GrantScape has awarded £8 million to 20 major biodiversity projects across England and Wales through its national 'Biodiversity Challenge Fund'. It has also supported many more projects at a local level. In Bedfordshire, these have included the Bedfordshire Otters and Rivers Project and habitat works at the Marston Vale Millennium Country Park.

Details are not yet available but we'll be sure to let you know as soon as they are! In the meantime stay tuned to the GrantScape website: www.grantscape.org.uk.





New action to protect and restore our watery habitats and species

BedsLife has just finished reviewing four new action plans to protect Bedfordshire and Luton's spaces and species! We've updated our old species action plans for water vole and European otter. And we've just finished writing two entirely new habitat action plans: reedbed and floodplain grazing marsh. In the 2001 Biodiversity Action Plan all of our waterway and wetland habitats were grouped together. We've separated them now to make it easier for us – and you! – to see what we're planning to do and how things are going.



Reedbed at the Marston Vale Forest Centre. Photo by Alexis Pym

If you'd like to see how we're getting along with all of our county action plans, check out the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) at www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk.

Internationally important arable plant area found in the Chalk Arc!

Results are in from a survey of potential nationally important arable plant areas in the Chalk Arc area of Bedfordshire and Luton. The survey team were in for a surprise when it was found that one is actually of European importance!

Arable plants – often referred to as 'arable weeds' – are now the most threatened group of plants in Britain. Once considered common nuisance plants, many arable plant species are on the verge of extinction. Bedfordshire is one of Britain's 15 richest vice-counties for arable plants.



Field gromwell, *Lithospermum arvense*. Photo by Tico Bassie

The experts at Plantlife UK have come up with a way to identify Important Arable Plant Areas based on a combination of soil type and plant species assemblage. A preliminary study using the Plantlife system revealed as many as 16 nationally important arable plant areas in Bedfordshire and Luton. A grant from the Chalk Arc Fund allowed us to survey five of these in detail. And our suspicions were confirmed: the survey found four nationally important sites. But the bonus proved to be a site in Luton, which scored high enough to be of European importance!

The report from the Chalk Arc arable plants survey is available on the BedsLife website: www.bedslife.org.uk/publications. Many thanks to the Chalk Arc Fund for supporting this valuable work!





Comings and goings

The old saying is true: it never rains but it pours. And we're sad to announce the departure of some big names in Bedfordshire's conservation family. Fortunately there is – to continue the metaphor – a silver lining to this cloud...

It was with great sadness – and not a little denial – that we heard of the impending retirement of Richard Woolnough of the Greensand Trust. With his boundless energy, his appetite for delicious meeting treats and his willingness to tackle the most controversial issues, Richard has fearlessly championed the Greensand Ridge as one of Bedfordshire's natural jewels. And while he perhaps has visions of quiet hours spent otter-watching in the Outer Hebrides, well, we're not going to let him get away that easily!

But with departures come arrivals, and we're excited to welcome Jon Balaam as the Greensand Trust's new Development Director. Jon is a familiar face, having been instrumental in creating the Chalk Arc Project. We're thrilled to have you on board, Jon!

Also leaving the BedsLife partnership family is Amanda Proud, who has moved next door to work as a consultant for ADAS in Cambridgeshire. Amanda has worked tirelessly for the Bedfordshire Otters and Rivers Project. We will miss her enthusiasm for and dedication to our county's watery habitats and critters. Best of luck in the new job, Amanda!

Finally, a big 'bon voyage!' to Emma Brearley of the Forestry Commission as she heads for distant pastures in Canada. We will miss her expertise and sunny disposition at the Woodland Forum meetings. All the best, Emma!

Nature nuggets

2008 is **Year of the Frog!** This year the European Association of Zoos & Aquariums is leading a major campaign to address the alarming extinction of amphibians around the world. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) estimates that at least 1/3 of all amphibian species are threatened with extinction. The Year of the Frog campaign is aiming to raise public awareness and funding for amphibian conservation projects. For information on the campaign and how you can help, visit www.2008yearofthefrog.org.



The **water vole has been given full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**. This full legal protection takes effect April 6 and is great news for the species' conservation prospects.

Big Lottery Fund and ITV have teamed up once more to launch **People's Millions**, giving ITV viewers a great opportunity to vote for their favourite projects to win National Lottery cash. Groups can apply for **up to £50,000**; the deadline for applications is May 15. Visit www.thepeoplesmillions.org.uk for more information or an application pack.

The **Tubney Charitable Trust has announced a new funding strategy**. They are embarking on a new, more focussed approach to giving. Biodiversity conservation is still one of the Trust's priorities, however the current programme is being closed. Please visit www.tubney.org.uk to find out how these changes may affect your organisation.





Upcoming events

Apr 16-18: The River Restoration Centre is holding their 9th annual conference **Is Restoring Back the Best Way Forward?** at the University of Exeter. The programme and booking form are available on the RRC website: www.therrc.co.uk.

May 12-16: The governing body of the Convention on Biological Diversity will have its ninth meeting (COP9) in Bonn May 19-30. The associated scientific meeting **Biodiversity Research – Safeguarding the Future** will take place May 12-16 and will introduce to the political discussion the results of and need for biodiversity research. Full details are available on the conference website: <http://zfmk.de/preCOP9/index.htm>.

May 21-24: University of Applied Sciences Erfurt, Natural England and CONTUREC invite you to the 3rd Conference of the Competence Network Urban Ecology. Their international conference **Urban Biodiversity and Design** will summarise for the first time in a global context current scientific and practical approaches to implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity in urban areas. The event will take place in Erfurt, Germany: please visit www.urbio2008.com for registration and programme information.

May 22: Don't forget, May 22 is the **International Day for Biological Diversity!** This year's theme is 'Biodiversity and Agriculture'. Find all the info, history, downloads and other good stuff at the IBD website: www.cbd.int/ibd/2008/.

Jun 3-6: Behind the problems of climate change, natural resource scarcity and pollution there are underlying issues about production, consumption and waste disposal. **Europe Green Week 2008** will look at the sustainable use of natural resources. As usual it will be at the Charlemagne Building of the European Commission in Brussels. Registration is free; for more information visit <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/greenweek/home.html>.

Jun 25: The Marston Vale Forest Centre will host **Wild flowers for new woods**, a Flora Locale training event. The cost is £100 for the day, or £75 for employees and volunteers of charities, parish councils, students and those not economically active. Details and the booking form are all available on the Flora Locale website: www.floralocale.org.

Sept 8-12: The Society for Ecological Restoration is hosting the **6th European Conference on Ecological Restoration** in Ghent. The aim of the conference is to present the state of the art in ecological restoration and to bring together scientists, policy makers, practitioners and stakeholders. To learn more about the programme and registration, visit http://ser2008.be/general_information.htm.

Oct 5-14: The **IUCN World Conservation Congress** is the world's largest and most diverse environmental congress, and will welcome to Barcelona more than 8,000 delegates from around the globe. Themes include 'a new climate for change', 'healthy environments – healthy people' and 'safeguarding the diversity of life'. Check out the website for more information: www.iucn.org/congress.



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