



SBIS Newsletter

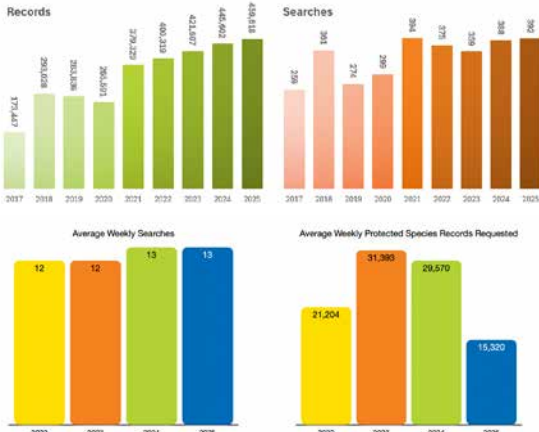


Autumn 2025

SBIS News

Commercial Data Enquiries

From the start of April this year, we have processed 392 searches, and supplied 459,618 species records. This equates to an average of 13 searches a week with 1,178 records per search.



Projects

Lidar-derived tree canopy polygon data

Data generated for hedgerows is now available on our website (www.suffolkbis.org.uk/hedgerow); this includes data on area, height, estimated volume and the total number of tree canopies. We have mapped these quality indicators at parish level and these can be requested free of charge. Additionally, data is available to download in GIS format.

County Wildlife Sites, Roadside Nature reserves, County GeoSites

Suffolk Wildlife Trust continues to rewrite CWS citations, which are regularly added into our database.

Data updates for SLA Partners

The 6-monthly GIS data updates were made available through our website in June. The next updates will be available in Nov/Dec.

Native Black Poplar Survey

The recording form and map is live and accessible to registered volunteers and Suffolk Tree Wardens. The planted sapling data is now included as a layer on the map, and volunteers are adding new records to this and verifying existing trees. Records of new trees are sent to the Native Black Poplar Recorder, Sue Hooton, to verify.

Ancient Woodland Inventory Update

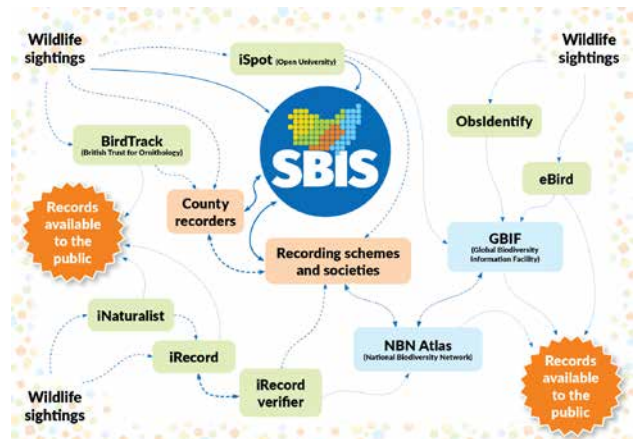
This October, Natural England approved and published the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Suffolk following work done by SBIS to research and update this dataset, see p. 10.

SBIS Website Knowledge Hub

Explore Ancient Woodland & Trees, in a section that details their importance as rare ecosystems and serves as a gateway to further resources on woodland ecology. A companion section focuses specifically on Suffolk's Ancient & Veteran Trees, offering insights into identifying these remarkable trees and highlighting notable examples across the county as well as signposting you to resources for recording Ancient trees in your area.

Discover the 2023 Suffolk Bat Atlas, a comprehensive publication, produced in partnership with the Suffolk Bat Group, that details the distribution and conservation status of all bat species found in Suffolk, providing invaluable data for conservationists and planners alike. The Suffolk Bat Group have also produced a series of fact sheets for each bat species.

Where do your records go?



From Index Cards to the Cloud

50 Years of SBIS

Martin Sanford, Manager, SBIS

In 1975, Suffolk's wildlife records existed as a collection of handwritten lists and index cards. Today, they reside in a digital database containing over 6.5 million records.

For the last 50 years, we have quietly disseminated high-quality data for a wide variety of uses, including publications, journals, websites, Action Plans, planning applications, conservation efforts, and academic studies. It has provided a reliable and efficient resource for naturalists to share their records and for decision-makers to access them.

The Early Years (1929–83)

The Suffolk Naturalists' Society (SNS) had been collecting information about the county's flora and fauna since its formation in 1929, but this information was not structured or publicly accessible.

During the 1970s, the demand for environmental information for planning and conservation grew. Across the country, Records Centres were established to meet this demand. In Suffolk, the SNS secured a grant of £1,500 from East Suffolk Council just before it was reorganised in 1974. This grant helped cover the costs of purchasing maps, index cards, filing cabinets, and other related items.

For several years, the centre was run by dedicated volunteers from the SNS, with Audrey Fitzjohn (editor of TSNS) taking the lead. In 1976, what was described as 'A set of maps and a cardboard box of records' moved to Ipswich Museum. Here, Norman Kerr and Sam Beaufoy operated the centre on Thursday mornings. The SNS organising committee noted its hope that the centre 'may be taken over by full-time Museum staff. (TSNS)

The MSC Era: A Foundation in Paper (1983–87)

It was not until 1983 that full-time staff were employed. A Manpower Services Commission (MSC) project, established by Howard Mendel at the Museum, provided funding and HR support for approximately 20 individuals over three years. This scheme was an excellent route into employment, providing many (including myself) with their first work experience after school or university. Many of the trainees went on to secure permanent environmental roles.

The Museum was an excellent training base. It had a good library, access to collections, and several skilled biologists in the Natural Sciences department, all of which provided a trustworthy and apolitical stance for the records centre. A significant amount of work was invested in extracting data from published sources, such as SNS Transactions, as well as from the Museum's collections and correspondence from local recorders.

Enquiries at the Museum reception meant we were often faced with tricky identifications – anything from tropical spiders found in bananas to obscure brown fungi. There were new plants to add to the herbarium, a regular stream of animal and bird corpses to put in the freezers for potential taxidermy, and plenty of unusual insects that visitors would expect us to recognise instantly!

In that era, automation was limited to an electronic typewriter. Letters were handwritten, then typed with carbon copies for reference, and most records arrived on paper. A significant task was given to trainees – including several with little interest in natural history – to produce a county gazetteer by listing all place names on the OS

From Index Cards to the Cloud



Norman Kerr (left) and Francis Simpson (right) manning the SNS stand at the Suffolk Show c. 1991

6-inch maps for each 1km square. This gazetteer, comprising over 16,000 entries, became a valuable resource that we still use today.

Grid References were rarely provided with records for certain groups, such as ornithologists, and had to be added later using the gazetteer. Distribution maps were created using pre-printed tetrad (2 x 2 km) maps of the county and 'Letraset' symbols, as seen in the first *Butterfly Atlas* (Mendel & Piotrowski, 1986).

County bird records were collated by the late, great Bob Warren – an indefatigable indexer who was able to cross-reference 20,000 records a year by species and sites using his own paper filing system. For plants, Francis Simpson's records were in disarray, despite the best efforts of Norman Kerr and Enid Hyde to put them in order for the production of the *Flora* in 1982. For most invertebrate groups, if you wanted to know the status of a species, you would need to consult the County Recorder or spend a lot of time reading the SNS Transactions.

Transition and Digital Beginnings (1987–2000)

When the MSC Scheme finished in 1987, the SNS stepped in again to support the manager's post until it was formally incorporated into the Ipswich Museum staff in 1992.



The digital age for the centre (then SBRC) also began around 1987. I had been experimenting with producing 10-km distribution maps on a Commodore 64 (connected to

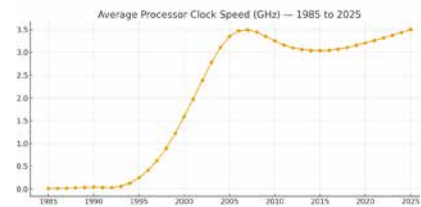
a television) at home in 1986, but it wasn't until we acquired our first PC in the office that we could start storing records electronically.

Initially, we used DBase 2 to store 'flat' files of records. Storage space was a limiting factor – the PC had a 10 MB hard drive – and much of our focus was on writing programs in BASIC to produce distribution maps from lists of grid references. We started with a package called Biorecord, written in DBase II by Colin Plant of the Passmore Edwards Museum. However, within a year, we transitioned to the Recorder system, which ran under Advanced Revelation (ARev). Recorder was rapidly becoming a national standard, with structures like taxon dictionaries and site hierarchies that were carried forward into later iterations: Recorder 2000 (Access-based) and the current SQL-based Recorder 6.

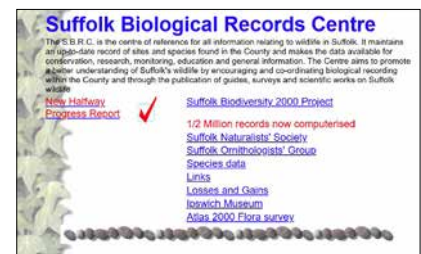
Another key development was the mapping software DMAP, written by Alan Morton of Silwood Park and launched in 1988. This enabled the production of high-quality distribution maps suitable for print and digital display. We used it to produce maps for most of the SNS Atlas series, and I even designed the SNS White Admiral logo using DMAP. The software evolved over 20 years, and Alan was very accommodating of user feedback. We still occasionally use DMAP today for its ease of use.



In those days, there was no IT Department. We had to manage the entire system, load or write our own software, and keep local backups on floppy disks and tape drives. Before MS Windows, there were many competing formats. Amstrad word processors were popular (and cheap), and we had to use the KERMIT software package to translate data between formats. Understanding ASCII coding was essential. The rate of change was rapid; processor speeds increased from 12 MHz in 1985 to 120 MHz in 1995, reaching 3.5 GHz by 2005.



In 1997, a business plan was produced. The Suffolk Biodiversity 2000 Project was our first attempt at attracting external funding, aiming to computerise some 600,000 records by 2000 and provide a baseline for Biodiversity Action Plans. We also launched our first website in 1997, written in Word and saved as HTML – easy to manage, but not very sophisticated.



When email was introduced in 1998, communication with recorders improved considerably. We were soon able to transfer data easily between satellite copies of the Recorder software, allowing us to use expert, external contractors to digitise specific datasets.

Growth, Funding, and New Capabilities (The 2000s)

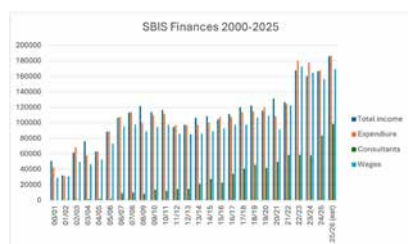
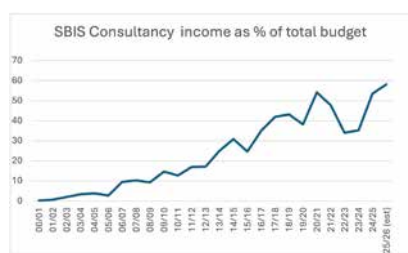
From 1987 to 2001, the centre was run single-handedly, with massive support from SNS Recorders and volunteers. It was not until the pilot 'Lifescapes' project began in 2001 that we were able to raise enough funds to hire extra staff.

The increasing demand for analysis using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) necessitated new expertise. With support from Natural England (NE) and Suffolk County Council (SCC), we hired Carrie Howard and started using MapInfo. This pilot soon demonstrated the potential for producing the alert maps and layers that planning authorities required.

By the early 2000s, the Centre was receiving a significant and predictable income from Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with Local Authorities, the Environment Agency, and Natural England. GIS was also essential in developing services for consultants, allowing them to ask questions like, ‘what protected species have been recorded within 2km of this site?’

Martin Horlock assumed the new role of GIS officer, playing a key part in developing these services. Successive GIS officers, including Ben Heather and Jane Mason, further developed these products.

Funding support from NE was crucial, enabling us to invest in staff and computing. However, this national funding (£30,000 per annum from 2008–10) could not be sustained. It saw a significant drop to £10,000pa (2011–14), then to £5,000pa in 2015, and nothing thereafter. This was a significant blow for many Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs), forcing some to close. In Suffolk, we were fortunate to have built a solid consortium of local funding. By 2015, a quarter of our budget was coming from consultancy work. This income has continued to rise and now provides over half of our annual budget.



In 2007, the SBRC office had just received flat-screen monitors, but data was still stored on floppy disks, CDs, and DVDs. We had a lovely, large wall with all the 1:25,000

maps covering Suffolk pasted on it, marked with coloured pins for essential sites like SSSIs.



A **Steering Group**, comprising representatives from all funding partners, the Wildlife Trust, and the SNS, was established to oversee the centre’s work and advise on strategic development. (Minutes from 2014 to the present are available on the **SBIS website**).

Data in the Modern Era: NBN and Big Data

The basic currency of biological recording remains the ‘4 Ws’ (who, what, where, and when). However, the resolution of that information has dramatically improved. Dates are usually to the day (not year), and locations are more precise thanks to GPS and phone apps. Sadly, the ‘who’ element has not improved, with many schemes allowing recorders to remain anonymous or use pseudonyms.

One of the largest changes is in the volume of data. For birds, this has risen from c. 20,000 records per year to c. 500,000 per year. Fortunately, the cost of computer storage has decreased considerably, falling from around £1,000/GB in 1990 to 1p/GB in 2025.



From the start, SBRC passed data on to national schemes. Initially, this was on paper: 10km square lists for BSBI Atlases or Tetrad ‘pink cards’ to the national BRC.

With internet access, sharing data digitally became easier, and the rate of data flow both up and down the system increased. Recorders could see their input appear on local and national atlases quite quickly, allowing them to see their impact and identify gaps for future surveys.

The launch of the NBN Gateway in 2001 allowed registered users to access UK species records online for the first time. Integration with our data became possible in 2004 with the launch of the SQL-based Recorder 6, which included an XML export facility. In 2006, ‘Data Access Controls’ were introduced, allowing providers to specify who could view sensitive data. SBRC experimented with small uploads, and then, in 2009, made the complete dataset available on the NBN with a restriction on public access at the 10-km scale.

Our ability to import data advanced significantly in 2007 with the ‘Import Wizard’ in the Recorder software. This allowed us to shift from digitising records ourselves to importing spreadsheets from external sources. Of course, this required validation to ensure the data was ‘clean’ – checking that dates, recorder names, and grid references were in the right formats and that location names didn’t include ‘my garden’, and so on.

The SBIS of Today (2010–25)

In 2012, Ben Heather took over our website, transitioning to our own domain and implementing a content management system (CMS) for a more cohesive style.



In 2016, a rebrand saw our name change from SBRC to the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS). This reflected a shift in emphasis from a perceived ‘dusty store’ or ‘black hole’ towards a more outward-facing service.

From Index Cards to the Cloud



The 2016 SBIS Team: Ben Heather, Martin Sanford and Gen Broad.

Following the rebrand, we changed to the Drupal CMS. This enabled the use of Indicia tools to create online surveys, link to an online data 'warehouse', and include live maps on the site based on data from iRecord.



(Thanks to the 'Wayback Machine' for allowing me to go back in time! Paste in a URL and it will provide links to view snapshots of any website over the years.)

By 2016, we were able to share 2.5 million records at the tetrad scale with the public via the NBN Gateway. We could also deliver data at full resolution directly to funding partners like the Environment Agency and Natural England.



The 2018 SBIS team: Martin Sanford, Gen Broad and Jane Mason

Sadly, when the Gateway was replaced by the new NBN Atlas in 2017, the drive for 'Open Data' meant the access controls were removed. We had to return to sharing data with partners via downloads from our website. The SBIS dataset on the NBN Atlas is still available at tetrad resolution to the public, but updating it has become more complex as the Atlas adopted the 'Darwin Core' format. An export facility has recently been developed for Recorder 6, and Data Access controls will likely be

implemented on the Atlas, allowing us to share data efficiently again.

The SBIS database currently holds just over 6.5 million records. Many of these are already available on the Atlas through different providers (e.g., BTO, BSBI). There is likely to be some duplication in a system with so many routes for records to flow, but with storage costs now so low, it probably doesn't matter. Better to have a record twice than not at all.

Today, we process over a quarter of a million records each year. Streamlining this is vital, and it is an area where AI will be able to help, particularly in sorting the 'wheat from the chaff' so that expert validators can focus on critical taxa.

The current **SBIS website** is far more sophisticated, offering a vast array of information through the **Knowledge Hub**. Individual user logins allow us to authorise downloads for SLA partners, and consultants can request data searches. Paperless management of quotes and invoicing, and other processes is also handled online.



The Records Centre has played a crucial role in the Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and, more recently, in its successor, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). It is a key player in the County Wildlife Sites system and provides the evidence for many planning decisions.

In 2021, the redevelopment of Ipswich Museum coincided with the COVID-19 lockdown. Staff quickly adapted to working from home, and IT departments found ways to work that they had previously said were impossible. Paper archives had to be rapidly reduced and transferred

to the new Suffolk Archive repository at The Hold in Ipswich.

The Hold has become the official address of the Service, although staff mostly work from home. SBIS has become a virtual entity, with data stored on cloud servers and business conducted through emails and the website. It is an efficient, if rather impersonal, system – emojis are no substitute for a smile and a chat over the morning coffee break!



The 2025 SBIS team: Martin Sanford, Hannah Alred and Emma Aldous

People Power

This entire history has been made possible by the hard work of countless individuals.

SNS Volunteers: Audrey Fitzjohn, Norman Kerr, Sam Beaufoy
MSC Staff (1983–87):

Ian Simmonds, Jenny Walker, David Bakewell, Bill Taylor, Nicky Fox, Stuart Carruthers, Mark Jones, Paul Wranek, Katherine Sanford, Graham List, Richard Deeks, Tracy Hitching, Steve Babbs, Vanessa Laxton, Alan Aldous, Susan Kirk, Gwyneth Cooke, Huw Kruger–Gray, Sara Burrows

Paid Staff:

Martin Sanford (1984–), Carrie Howard (2001–03), Martin Horlock (2003–08), Harriet Whittle (2003–05), Mary Norden (2005–08), Gen Broad (2008–20), Ben Heather (2009–17), Jane Mason (2017–23), Andy Mercer (2017–), Emma Aldous (2021–), Hannah Alred (2021–)

Paid Contracts and Volunteers

(Post-MSC): Anna Cordon, Paul Lee, Peter Furze, Dan Sanford, Susan Stone, Rosemary Milner, Reg Clarke, Leonie Washington

50 Years of SBIS

1975 – The Paper Age

1975: Founded

- Started as the 'Environmental Records Centre' with a £1500 grant.
- Began with one volunteer manager, one day a week.
- Early work focused on collating paper records of birds, plants, and invertebrates.

1976: The First Move

- Relocated to Ipswich Museum with just "a set of maps and a cardboard box of records."

1978: Building the System

- Adopted the 2km square (tetrad) recording system.
- Began building a data bank of SSSIs and wildlife reserves.

1982-85:

Major Surveys Launched

- Manpower Services Commission project used to manually add records to card archives.
- Launched key county surveys: Dragonflies, Butterflies, Reptiles & Amphibians, and Orchids.
- Published "Francis Simpson's Flora of Suffolk" (1982).

1986 – The Computer Age

1986: Going Digital

- Purchased the first computer (a Spirit XT with a 10Mb hard drive).
- Began transitioning from index cards to digital spreadsheets.
- Published the first computer-plotted map.

1987-8: New Tools

- SNS funded the first SBRC Manager post.
- Acquired key software: BIORECORD, RECORDER (first iteration), and DMAP.
- Began planning for 'Primesites' (which became County Wildlife Sites).

1989-91: Growth & Funding

- Secured joint funding from Ipswich Borough Council (IBC).
- Upgraded to a 90Mb computer.
- Earned first commercial income from consultancy.

1992-3: Milestones

- **Reached 50,000 records.**
- Consolidated as part of the Natural Sciences Dept. at Ipswich Museum.
- Upgraded to a networked system (3 PCs) and a 320 MB server.

1994-7: Getting Connected

- **Reached 100,000 Flora records.**
- Gained internet access, an email address, and launched the first website.
- Began habitat mapping and Biodiversity Action Planning (BAP).

1999: A New Milestone

- **Reached 500,000 records.**
- Moved to Suffolk County Council (SCC) hosting.

2000-8: GIS & National Data

- National Biodiversity Network (NBN) established.
- Installed MapInfo (GIS) software.
- Launched Recorder 6.
- SBRC Flickr Group starts

2009-11:

1 Million Records

- **Reached the 1 millionth record.**
- Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC) was formed.
- Published "The Mammals of Suffolk" and "A Flora of Suffolk"
- Suffolk Moths website launched

2012-13:

2 Million Records

- **Reached the 2 millionth record.**
- iRecord launched, transforming data submission.
- SBRC Board formed

2015 – The AI Age

2015: Smart Recording

- Launched SuffolkBRO, allowing custom surveys based on iRecord.
- Began downloading county data directly from iRecord and Birdtrack.

2016: Rebrand & 3 Million

- **Reached the 3 millionth record.**
- Rebranded as the **Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS).**

2018: 4 Million Records

- **Reached the 4 millionth record.**
- NBN Atlas launched, replacing the old NBN Gateway.

2020: The COVID-19 Effect

- Lockdown sparked a massive surge in garden and local wildlife recording.
- Staff transitioned to working from home.
- Office and paper archives transferred to 'The Hold'.

2021: 5 Million Records

- **Reached the 5 millionth record.**
- Began work on the new Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

2024: 6 Million Records

- **Reached the 6 millionth record.**

2025: 50th Anniversary

- **Database now holds over 6.5 million species records.**
- Supported by a strong network of volunteers, experts, and partners.
- Looking ahead to AI-assisted monitoring



The Digital Fieldworker

AI and the Future of Conservation

Emma Aldous, SBIS

AI is becoming an essential part of conservation and data management, offering new ways to monitor, identify, and protect the natural world.

The challenge faced is one of scale. With millions of species records to process each year, manual validation of every single record becomes an impossibility. This is where AI can help: automating routine tasks, analysing datasets, and generating predictive insights.

AI in Data Management

Data Validation & Cleaning: Most of the data in the SBIS database is from external sources, all of which must be rigorously verified. AI is perfectly suited to checking the data for a wide range of errors. Rapidly sifting through thousands of common species data, allowing human experts to focus on validating rare or critical taxa.

Streamlining Data Exchange: The complexity of national data sharing means using specific formats. AI-enabled export facilities and data translation tools ensure that datasets are formatted correctly, facilitating easier sharing with national platforms and partners.

AI in the Field

Acoustic Monitoring and Identification: For elusive species like bats, birds, and nocturnal insects, AI-powered acoustic analysis is a game changer. Solar-powered listening devices can be deployed in the landscape to record ambient sounds over long periods. AI algorithms, trained on vast libraries of sound, can then automatically identify species from

their calls. Technology such as this will give a clearer understanding of the distribution of species.

Image Analysis & Remote Sensing: AI algorithms can be trained to analyse images from many sources:

- **Camera Traps:** Quickly sifting through thousands of camera trap images to identify and count species, such as badgers, hedgehogs and deer.
- **Drone Footage:** Analysing drone footage to survey inaccessible areas, providing valuable data on habitat conditions.

Environmental DNA (eDNA)

Analysis: eDNA involves collecting and analysing trace DNA from environmental samples. For Suffolk's rivers and marine areas, AI-powered analysis of eDNA samples can provide rapid detection of species, such as the European eel, or can monitor biodiversity along the coast.

Predictive Modelling & Strategic Planning

AI can analyse geospatial and ecological data to forecast trends to inform conservation decisions.

Climate Change & Habitat

Suitability: By analysing environmental variables AI models can predict how species distribution might shift in response to climate change. This data is vital for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), allowing planners to identify

optimal locations for habitat creation and prioritise areas for protection and connectivity.

The 'Conservation CoPilot': An AI "Conservation CoPilot" that can distil millions of research papers into actionable conservation advice is already being developed. This tool would allow us to ask "how to increase bat populations in a specific location" and receive evidence-based recommendations tailored to the soil type, species, and local environmental context.

Ethical & Practical Hurdles

Transparency and Validation: AI algorithms must be tested against high-quality, scientifically verified data, and the sources of the data powering the algorithms must be traceable. The true environmental cost (the carbon footprint) of running large AI systems must be considered against their utility.

Human Expertise is Key: AI may be powerful, but it cannot replace traditional fieldwork, ecological expertise, or local knowledge. AI developers must ensure that these tools are designed with a deep understanding of real-world ecological complexities and that the human element is central to setting parameters, interpreting results, and acting on the ground.

The future lies in a balanced approach: embracing AI to help manage the deluge of data and inform strategic planning, while ensuring that the core values of local recording, community-led data collection, and human ecological expertise remain paramount. The digital fieldworker may be here, but they will still need the wisdom of the local naturalist to guide their actions.



The SBIS Species of the Month

Explore some of Suffolk's fascinating wildlife species with us

Get started



1 Oct 2025: Speckled Bush-cricket



2 Sep 2025: Leopard Slug



3 Aug 2025: Small Copper



4 Jul 2025: Crested Cow-wheat



5 Jun 2025: Emperor Dragonfly



6 May 2025: Slow Worm



7 Apr 2025: Hawthorn Shieldbug



8 Mar 2025: Harlequin Ladybird



9 Feb 2025: Grey Heron



10 Jan 2025: Dog's Vomit Slime Mould



11 Dec 2024: Wormwood Moonshiner



12 Nov 2024: Magpie Inkcap



13 Oct 2024: Redwing



14 Sep 2024: Oak Apple Gall Wasp



15 Aug 2024: Grayling



16 Jul 2024: Nightjar



17 Jun 2024: Western Conifer Seed Bug



18 May 2024: Lady's Smock



Suffolk's Ancient Woodland Map Expands

Hannah Alred, Biological Records Officer, SBIS

The Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) is excited to announce the completion of an extensive update to the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) for Suffolk. Ancient woodlands, defined as areas that have been continuously wooded since at least 1600, are irreplaceable habitats of immense ecological and historical value.

Suffolk's ancient woodland coverage is currently at 1.4%, which is below the national average of 2.5%. This project, which followed the methodology outlined in Natural England's AWI Handbook, aimed to provide a more precise and up-to-date inventory.

[The project involved five phases:](#)

Phase 1 (Autumn 2021)

Comparison of Epoch 1 Ordnance Survey County Series 1st Edition (1861-1885) and county Aerial Photography (2018-2020). Woodland or wood pasture parkland that was present on both were taken forward.

Phase 2 (Autumn 2022)

Existing Ancient Woodland was validated using the collated Phase 1 data and remaining data were cleaned and categorised.

Phase 3 (Spring 2023)

Cartographic, woodland survey and existing data evidence sources identified for each potential ancient woodland and wood pasture parkland site.

[Key evidence sources:](#)

- Hodkinson's County Map of Suffolk (1783)
- Tithe maps and apportionments (1837-1845)
- SBIS Ancient Woodland Indicator Species data

Phase 4 (Autumn 2024)

Evidence-based decisions of ancient/recent, woodland type etc. for sites based on results of Phase 3.

Phase 5 (Spring 2025)

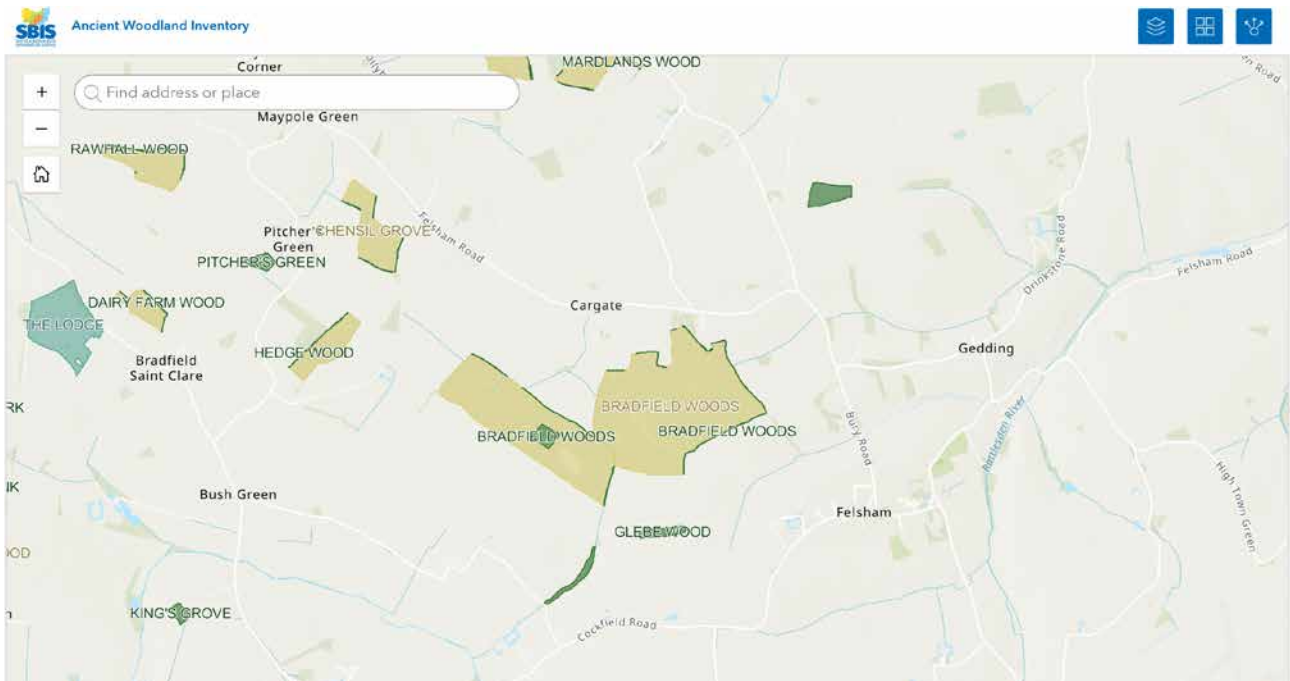
Data finalised and submitted to Natural England (NE). Dataset published by NE October 2025.

[Key Findings from the Ancient Woodland Inventory Update](#)

The updated Ancient Woodland Inventory for Suffolk has revealed some fascinating and important insights into the county's woodland history and current status, including significant increase in the total area of designated ancient woodland. The project also captured ancient wood pasture and parkland for the first time.

[Increase in Designated Area](#)

The total area of Ancient Woodland (AW) recorded in Suffolk is now 6,919 ha, a substantial increase from the 4,524 ha previously recorded. This represents a significant rise in the number of designated woodland parcels, which have more than doubled from 644 to 1,448.



As may be expected, recognition of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland has grown significantly across the region, however, designation of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites shows lower growth:

- Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW): 4,134 ha, a 34.4%.
- Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS): 1,525 ha, a 5.4%.
- Ancient Wood Pasture and Parkland (AWPP): 2,241 ha (previously unrecorded).
- Infilled Ancient Wood Pasture and Parkland (IAWPP): 1,260 ha (previously unrecorded).

The update also identified 7,085 ha of Long-Established Woodland (LEW), a new dataset published by Natural England, which identifies sites that have been continuously wooded since the 1800s.

District-Level Breakdown

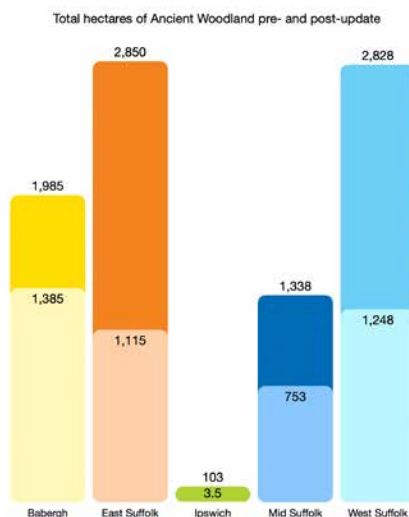
The data provides a clearer picture of ancient woodland distribution across Suffolk districts. The graph (right) shows the pre-update as pale shading compared to the darker post-update figures.

This revised dataset provides a valuable toolkit for conservation efforts, land-use planning, and a deeper understanding of Suffolk's unique ecological heritage.

View and download data

Data are publicly accessible on the [Natural England GIS map](#), it is important to note, that Natural England are currently running two versions of the AWI dataset while awaiting all county updates, therefore, it is the 'Revised' copy that has the updated data for Suffolk.

At SBIS, we have created an interactive map on our website to explore the outcomes of the project, making it easier to compare which parcels have been added to the AWI as well as those that have updated boundaries. [SBIS Ancient Woodland Interactive Map](#)



Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the dedication of numerous individuals and organisations. SBIS extends its sincere gratitude to the Online Historic Map Volunteers, Archive Map Volunteer Group, Field Survey Volunteers, the Archive Team at The Hold, Gary Battell, Mike Crewe, Gethin Rees, members of the AWI Knowledge Hub, Jon Isherwood and his team, the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service Team, Emma Aldous, Martin Sanford, and Clare Durose and the Natural England Team.

This project was made possible by funding from the Woodland Trust and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and the management and implementation of the national AWI update by Natural England.





The SBIS Knowledge Hub

Explore a wealth of local Biodiversity Information on our website



Ancient Woodland

Image: Nick Featlings, Unsplash



Ancient Trees



Suffolk's Hedgerows

Image: Nick Featlings, Unsplash



Suffolk's Species

Image: Peter Linder, Pix by 52, iStockphoto



Suffolk's Habitats

Image: Peter Linder, Pix by 52, iStockphoto



Suffolk Bird Atlas

Image: Peter Linder, Pix by 52, iStockphoto



Bats in Suffolk

Image: Peter Linder, Pix by 52, iStockphoto



Traditional Orchards

Image: Orchards East Forum



Protected Sites

Image: English Fungus by Peter Kitchener



Species of the month

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- Dragonflies and Damselflies

Suffolk's Priority Habitats

- Arable field margins
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marshes
- Coastal saltmarsh and intertidal mudflats
- Coastal sand dunes
- Coastal vegetated shingle
- Hedgerows
- Lowland acid grasslands and heathlands
- Lowland calcareous grasslands
- Lowland fens
- Lowland meadows

Historical Ecology

Echoes in the Landscape - Tracing the Historical Roots of Suffolk's Countryside

Emma Aldous, SBIS

The Suffolk countryside, a mosaic of ancient woodlands, rolling claylands, coastal heaths, and river valleys, is more than just a pleasing vista. It is a living document, a palimpsest on which millennia of human activity have been written, erased, and overwritten.



Historical Ecology

To understand Suffolk's biodiversity – why some flowers grow in certain woods but not others, or why some field boundaries are vibrant while others are barren – we must explore this living document. Historical ecology combines ecology, history, archaeology, and geography to study the enduring relationship between people and their environment over time.

The Rackham Method

Professor Oliver Rackham, born in Bungay, is a key figure in historical ecology. His understanding that the British landscape highlights its ancient nature, encourages an appreciation for the rich history and beauty of our environment.¹ His approach, combining fieldwork, documentary research, and botanical observation,

revolutionised how we view our surroundings. He challenged “factoids” such as the notion that a blanket of primaevial forest once covered Britain.² Instead, he demonstrated that England has, for most of its history, been a country of fields and small, managed woods.³

Central to Rackham's philosophy was the concept of *genius loci*, or the spirit of a place. He argued that every wood and field possesses a unique history that has shaped its character.⁴ For example, to understand a wood, we must investigate its boundaries, the age and form of its trees, the composition of its ground flora, its place-name, and surviving historical records.

The Ecologist's Toolkit

Historical ecology gathers a wide range of evidence. With each source offering distinct insights, giving a comprehensive understanding of the landscape.⁵

- **Archaeology:** The physical remains of past human activity provide the foundational layer. From the Neolithic causewayed enclosures and Bronze Age burial mounds that mark the first large-scale modifications of the landscape,⁶ to the linear remains of Roman roads, earthworks of medieval castles and moated manors, and, more recently, concrete runways and blast pens of Second World War airfields.⁷

1 Oliver Rackham, Alumnus, Fellow and Master, <https://tinyurl.com/tmbatcpm>

2 Oliver Rackham, <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/rackham>

3 (PDF) Historical ecology: Past, present and future, <https://tinyurl.com/mrn4z5zy>

4 Professor Oliver Rackham, <https://tinyurl.com/235br5ah>

5 Toward principles of historical ecology, <https://tinyurl.com/2wbsbm22>

6 4. Historic Landscape Study, <https://tinyurl.com/yee6ffeh>

7 History of Suffolk, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Suffolk

Historical Ecology

- **Documentary & Cartographic Evidence:** Written records offer invaluable insights. The *Domesday Book* of 1086 provides a snapshot of land use, mentioning places that still exist today.¹ Records from estates, monasteries, wills and legal documents reveal the details of local economic activity and land ownership. Later, tithe maps and estate maps showed field layouts, details of land use, and the enclosure of land that was previously common land.²
- **Botanical & Ecological Evidence:** The landscape itself acts as an archive. The species found in a woodland can reveal its age; slow-colonising plants, such as oxlip (*Primula elatior*) or small-leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*), indicate an ancient, undisturbed woodland.³ The gnarled form of an ancient pollarded oak speaks of centuries of management for wood pasture.⁴ Rackham's field notebooks, filled with species lists, sketches, and hand-drawn maps, illustrate the practice of reading living evidence.⁵

Each era adapted, erased, or built upon the features left by its predecessors. A Roman road sets the course of a parish boundary; a medieval deer park is carved out of a Domesday-era wood; a 20th-century airfield is laid over a pattern of 18th-century enclosure fields, which themselves preserve the memory of medieval strips.

From Wildwood to Domesday

The deep roots of Suffolk's landscape have created patterns of settlement and communication which still exist. Although these ancient clues are often faint, they are essential for understanding the environment through time.

- 1 Suffolk's Story 21 <https://www.suffolktrust.org.uk/suffolk-s-story-21>
- 2 South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland <https://tinyurl.com/47sfvzab>
- 3 Oliver Rackham - BSBI, <https://tinyurl.com/5kkc7y49>
- 4 Walking with giants, the oaks of Staverton Park, <https://tinyurl.com/2jbvcdwh>
- 5 Oliver Rackham, <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/rackham>

Suffolk's First Farmers and the Fading Wildwood

While there is evidence of human presence dating back to the Palaeolithic, it was the arrival of Neolithic farmers around 4000 BCE that began the widespread transformation of the landscape. These communities began clearing the post-glacial "wildwood" – a mosaic of oak, elm, lime, and hazel – for cultivation and grazing.⁶ This gradual modification of the landscape, created a patchwork of clearings and managed woodland.

Roman Order and Icen Territory

The Roman conquest imposed a new layer of order. Suffolk remained a largely rural and agricultural region; however, the Romans established key infrastructure that would long outlast their rule.⁷ Roads, such as Peddars Way, and the route followed by the A12, were driven through the landscape, bypassing earlier, organic trackways. These routes were so well-built that many still persist as modern roads, footpaths, or parish boundaries.

Anglo-Saxon Settlement

The collapse of Roman rule was followed by the arrival of the Angles and Suffolk became as a distinct entity, the territory of the *Sudfole* or 'southern folk'.⁸ During the Anglo-Saxon era the pattern of villages and hamlets, the network of lanes connecting them, and the boundaries of parishes were established, and key settlements, such as Ipswich and Sudbury, became important civic centres. These ancient boundaries have had long-lasting ecological consequences. A hedge marking an Anglo-Saxon parish boundary is not the same as a hedge planted during the enclosures of the 19th century. Having existed for over a thousand years, it has had time to be colonised by a rich diversity of slow spreading, woody species – such as field maple, hornbeam,

- 6 A History of Suffolk – Wilcuma, <https://www.wilcuma.org.uk/east-anglia/a-history-of-suffolk/>
- 7 History of Suffolk, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Suffolk
- 8 Ibid

spindle, and dogwood. Becoming a wildlife corridor through the agricultural landscape. The actions of the Anglo-Saxon's are detectable in the biodiversity of the 21st century hedge.

The Medieval Imprint

Medieval land owners inscribed the most intricate patterns onto the landscape. Driven by a feudal society, economic pressures created unique and lasting ecological signatures in the environment. These living landscapes exhibit a biodiversity that is a direct legacy of medieval land management practices.



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Coppice and Standard at Bradfield Woods

Bradfield Woods has an unbroken record of traditional management stretching back to at least 1252.⁹ It is a quintessential example of a 'coppice-with-standards' wood, a system that was the backbone of the rural economy for centuries. Hazel and ash were coppiced on a rotation of 7 to 20 years, producing a sustainable crop of small-diameter poles that were used for everything from firewood and fencing to wattle-and-daub construction.¹⁰ Dotted amongst the coppice were 'standard' trees, usually oaks, left to grow to maturity for structural timber.¹¹

The result of this constant cycle was a dynamic mosaic of light and shade. In the years after coppicing, sunlight would flood the woodland floor, triggering a spectacular display of wildflowers.

- 9 Bradfield Woods National Nature Reserve, <https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/bradfieldwoods>
- 10 Coppicing at Hayley Wood, <https://tinyurl.com/y28j85mv>
- 11 Woodland management, <https://tinyurl.com/57dsxufj>



intensive agriculture.¹³ Instead, a unique system evolved. ‘**Brecking**’, ploughing a patch of heath for a few years until the fertility was exhausted, then abandoning it to revert to open vegetation, which gave the area its name ‘Breckland’.¹⁴

From the 13th century onwards, the Brecks were dominated by industrial-scale rabbit warrening. Rabbits, farmed for their meat and fur in vast warrens, became a key part of the local economy.¹⁵ Their constant burrowing, combined with sheep grazing, created an open, disturbed environment. Without the natural succession to scrub and woodland, a unique habitat mosaic of acid and calcareous grasslands, lichen-rich heaths, and bare sand was formed. Creating a haven habitat for highly specialised and rare species, such as the stone curlew and spanish catchfly.¹⁶

In the 1950s, myxomatosis decimated the rabbit population.¹⁷ This, combined with the decline in sheep grazing and large-scale afforestation, resulted in the loss of over 86% of the Breckland heaths between 1934 and 1980.¹⁸ Today, conservation management aims to mimic this lost history. Grazing is being reintroduced, and in some areas, the ground is deliberately disturbed with rotavators to replicate the soil-churning effect of the lost rabbit population, creating the bare ground that Breckland’s specialist wildlife needs to survive.¹⁹

As the coppice shoots grew back, their dense, bushy structure provided nesting cover for migrant songbirds, and a perfect habitat for small mammals such as the protected hazel dormouse.¹ Coppicing also conferred longevity; some of the gnarled, sprawling ash stools at Bradfield are thought to be over 1,000 years old.²

Oliver Rackham was instrumental in saving Bradfield Woods in the 1970s and studied it throughout his life.³ Today, Suffolk Wildlife Trust continues this 800-year-old tradition. Cutting coppices and selling coppice products, in a direct continuation of the medieval system that sustains the wood’s exceptional biodiversity.⁴



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Pollards and Pasture at Staverton Park

If Bradfield represents the utilitarian wood, Staverton Park represents the aristocratic wood. Described by Rackham as a “famous and awesome place of Tolkienesque wonder and beauty,” it is often mistaken for a primeval forest.⁵ In reality, it is a magnificent, overgrown medieval deer park, used for hunting by nobility, including the sister of King Henry VIII.⁶ Now registered by Historic England as a Grade II* Park, its unique character stems from this history.⁷

The defining features are the veteran oak pollards. Pollarding involves cutting the tree above the reach of browsing deer and cattle, encouraging a dense head of new branches, which can be harvested for wood. Repeated over centuries, this created the “mighty and bizarre shapes” of the Staverton oaks.⁸ Wood pasture is now recognised as a habitat of immense European importance.⁹ The ancient, hollow trunks, decaying branches, and deadwood provide niche habitats for thousands of species of fungi and invertebrates, many of which are now nationally rare.¹⁰ The park is also famed for its holly trees, some of the largest and oldest in Britain, which form a dark understorey to the oaks.¹¹

Conservation at Staverton today is explicitly informed by this medieval past. Management involves the ‘retrenching’ of ancient pollards – restorative pruning that mimics the old cutting cycle to prolong the trees’ lives. New, locally-sourced oak saplings are being planted to ensure there is a future generation of these giants, a conscious effort to perpetuate a medieval landscape for its 21st-century biodiversity.¹²



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Warrens and Heaths of the Breckland

The Breckland of north-west Suffolk presents another landscape forged by history, this time shaped by poverty rather than wealth. Its light, sandy soils and dry climate made the area unsuitable for

1 Bradfield Woods National Nature Reserve, <https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/bradfieldwoods>

2 Ibid

3 Working the woods, <https://mattgaw.com/2017/03/20/698/>

4 Bradfield Woods National Nature Reserve, <https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/bradfieldwoods>

5 Walking with giants, the oaks of Staverton Park, <https://tinyurl.com/2jbvcdwh>

6 Suffolk’s Story 21, <https://www.suffolk.institute.org.uk/suffolk-s-story-21>

7 Staverton Park, Butley, <https://tinyurl.com/mr3czp24>

8 Another Walk In The Woods, <https://blog.rowleygallery.co.uk/another-walk-in-the-woods/>

9 Wood Pasture and Parkland, <https://tinyurl.com/mr33wsce>

10 Walk Amongst Ancient Oaks, <https://tinyurl.com/9u2zexcw>

11 Walking with giants, the oaks of Staverton Park, <https://tinyurl.com/2jbvcdwh>

12 Case Study: Staverton Woods and The Thicks, <https://tinyurl.com/2etc5s42>

13 Brecks, <https://tinyurl.com/35zbzzju>

14 Breckland, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breckland>

15 The Brecks, <https://tinyurl.com/j4ajmw72>

16 Brecks, <https://tinyurl.com/35zbzzju>

17 Ibid

18 Breckland, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breckland>

19 The Brecks, <https://tinyurl.com/j4ajmw72>

Historical Ecology

The Curious Case of Suffolk's Ridge and Furrow

For many, the undulating pattern of medieval 'ridge and furrow' ploughing is a familiar sight. The remains of the open-field system, where individual strips were farmed within large, communal fields.¹ Here, however, surviving ridge and furrow patterns are very rare.²

Their absence is an echo that reveals Suffolk's agricultural prosperity and 'improvement'. Unlike areas where heavy clay soils were turned over to pasture after the Black Death, the fertile claylands of Suffolk remained prime arable land.³ During the great enclosure movements, the open fields were rationalised into the hedged fields we see today. This process included levelling the ground through cross-ploughing and installing new under-drainage systems, which effectively erased the medieval ridges.⁴ While traces can occasionally be found as faint soil marks on aerial photographs, the physical topography was lost, taking with it the microhabitats created by the ridges and furrows, which had supported damp-loving species in the wet furrows and those preferring drier conditions on the crests of the ridges.⁵ The ghost of Suffolk's ridge and furrow is a lost layer of habitat complexity.

The habitats of most value for their biodiversity are not always pristine wildernesses. They are often cultural artefacts, created and maintained by centuries of human activity. The coppicing at Bradfield, the pollarding at Staverton, and the rabbit warrening in the Brecks were all keystone processes, arresting natural succession and creating diverse habitat niches. When these traditional management systems were abandoned, biodiversity

declined, revealing a central truth: it is not always about 'leaving nature alone', but about careful, historically informed, human activity. The conservationist with a chainsaw in Bradfield Woods is performing the same vital ecological function as a medieval peasant with a billhook.

Concrete, Conifers and Conservation

The last two centuries have seen unprecedented landscape changes in Suffolk. These transformations have overwritten the intricate medieval palimpsest with bold and often brutal new inscriptions, creating both ecological challenges and surprising new opportunities.

Enclosure and Intensification

Parliamentary Enclosure fundamentally reshaped Suffolk's character, replacing open fields and commons with a patchwork of geometric fields bounded by species-poor hedges.⁶ Although these new hedgerows created thousands of miles of new wildlife corridors, vast areas of common land, vital biodiversity reservoirs, were lost. This restructuring was followed by the intensification of farming practices. The adoption of artificial fertilisers and pesticides, coupled with improved drainage, led to a catastrophic decline in the remaining unimproved grasslands and the loss of countless field ponds and other marginal habitats.⁷



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The Ecological Legacy of WWII Airfields

The most sudden and dramatic landscape transformation was the 'Friendly Invasion' of World War II. The arrival of the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) had an

impact described as the greatest since the Norman Conquest. Across the flat arable land, dozens of enormous airfields were constructed, covering vast swathes of land. Building a single base used up to 250,000 tonnes of concrete.⁸

After the war, many of these bases were abandoned, becoming "ghost fields" in the landscape.⁹ The concrete and disturbed, compacted ground did not revert to farmland. Instead, they created an entirely new habitat type. The runways and hardstandings, built with lime-rich aggregate, provided a nutrient-poor, free-draining, and often calcareous substrate.¹⁰ These conditions are ideal for pioneer species, lichens, mosses, and wildflowers that thrive on impoverished soils. They have become unintentional nature reserves, a modern analogue for the threatened habitats of the Breckland heaths or coastal shingle.

The American presence also left a more direct biological legacy. At the former Rivenhall airfield in Essex, Florida Oak and a species of willow used by Navajo Indians for arrow shafts, were discovered growing near a former hangar.¹¹ These non-native plants pose a fascinating question for conservationists about how we manage such unique historical, biological artefacts.



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The Age of Afforestation

The 20th century also saw the planting of new forests on a massive scale. Driven by a post-war policy to create a strategic timber reserve, the Forestry Commission acquired huge areas of low-value

1 Ridge and furrow, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ridge_and_furrow

2 The distribution of ridge and furrow in East Anglia, <https://tinyurl.com/3u7a7j6p>

3 South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland, <https://tinyurl.com/47sfvzab>

4 The distribution of ridge and furrow in East Anglia, <https://tinyurl.com/3u7a7j6p>

5 Ridge and furrow, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ridge_and_furrow

6 South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland, <https://tinyurl.com/47sfvzab>

7 Lowland dry acid grassland, <https://tinyurl.com/bdemzztz>

8 Masters of the Air: The Friendly Invasion of Suffolk, <https://tinyurl.com/kak3nt63>

9 The ghost airfields of Suffolk, <https://tinyurl.com/3v7ej4nz>

10 Eye, Suffolk, <https://tinyurl.com/5c7ad55t>

11 "Rivenhall – The history of an Essex airfield", <https://tinyurl.com/374y9rht>

Historical Land-Use Eras in Suffolk and their Ecological Signatures

Era	Dominant Land Use / Event	Key Landscape Features	Lasting Ecological Signature / Biodiversity Impact
Medieval	Open-field farming; Wood pasture & Coppicing; Deer Parks; Rabbit Warrens	Ridge & furrow (rarely surviving); Ancient pollards & coppice stools; Park pales; Warren mounds	Species-rich ancient woodlands; Veteran trees as keystone structures; Disturbance-adapted heathland flora/fauna. Human management as a keystone process.
Post-Medieval	Parliamentary Enclosure; Agricultural Improvement; Landscape Parks	Geometric fields; Species-poor hedges; Drainage ditches; Designed parklands	Loss of common land habitats; Creation of hedgerow corridors; Altered hydrology of claylands, erasing medieval topography; Creation of aesthetic, often non-native, parkland landscapes.
Modern (WWII)	Military Airfield Construction	Concrete runways, perimeter tracks, hardstandings, Nissen huts	Creation of nutrient-poor, free-draining substrates favouring pioneer species, lichens, and calcicolous flora. Creation of novel ecosystems and introduction of non-native species.
Modern (Post-War)	Agricultural Intensification; Commercial Afforestation	Large, open arable fields ('prairies'); Monoculture conifer plantations (e.g., Thetford Forest)	Major loss of unimproved grassland, heathland, and ponds; Soil and water pollution; Soil acidification under conifers; Loss of habitat connectivity and landscape diversity.

land, particularly in the Brecks and the coastal Sandlings, and planted them with dense, geometric blocks of non-native conifers.¹

This afforestation led to the creation of Thetford Forest, one of the most extensive lowland forests in the country, and dramatically altered the character of these regions. The open, windswept vistas of the heaths were replaced by a dark, enclosed landscape.² While providing valuable habitat for specialist species, such as the goshawk, their creation came at the cost of thousands of hectares of heathland. The dense canopy and carpet of acidic needles associated with conifer plantations support a far lower biodiversity than the open heathland they replaced.³

These modern ruptures impart a valuable lesson. Conservation cannot be based solely on aesthetic judgements of what is 'natural' or 'beautiful'. The WWII airfields have inadvertently become some of the most important sites for rare flora precisely because of their 'unnatural' history. A nuanced approach recognises that some of our valuable modern habitats are the accidental legacy of the 20th century's most disruptive event.

Conserving the Echoes, Historical Ecology in Practice

Understanding the deep history of the landscape is important for

effective nature conservation. By recognising the past, conservation organisations can create tailored management strategies to complement the unique ecological character of each site, supporting its historical context.

The Mission of the Wildlife Trusts

Since its foundation, Suffolk Wildlife Trust has been at the forefront of protecting and restoring the county's wildlife and wild landscapes.⁴ Its ambitious strategy, which aims to have 30% of Suffolk's land and sea in recovery for nature by 2030, is predicated on a landscape-scale approach. This vision of a "bigger, better and more connected landscape" can only be achieved by understanding the historical context that has created the fragmented mosaic of habitats we see today.⁵

Historically-Informed Management

Conservation bodies in Suffolk apply historical ecology through tailored management plans.

- **Woodlands:** coppicing and pollarding to support woodland flora and provide cover for dormice and nesting birds.
- **Heaths and Grasslands:** grazing with traditional livestock to prevent scrub encroachment and maintain species-rich swards.
- **Wetlands:** restoring historic field ponds to provide habitats for amphibians and invertebrates.⁶

The Role of National Bodies

A framework of national protection and funding supports this work. Historic England identifies and designates nationally important historic landscapes, providing a high level of protection in the planning system.

Natural England provides the primary mechanism for ecological protection and management. Through the designation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), it safeguards the most valuable wildlife sites. It also provides funding, allowing landowners and conservation charities to undertake costly historical management tasks, such as specific grazing practices or restoring traditional boundaries.⁷

A Wilder Future Informed by a Deeper Past

Suffolk today reflects a rich history – the curve of a field boundary hints at medieval farming practices, while wildflowers along roadsides are remnants of a once-grazed common. The gnarled pollard oak represents a centuries-old wood pasture economy. By exploring these echoes, we gain a deeper understanding of our landscape's heritage. Historical ecology provides a vital framework for effective conservation, enabling interventions that resonate with the unique character of each area. To ensure a wilder, more resilient future for Suffolk, we must appreciate its intricate past.

1 Brecks, <https://tinyurl.com/35zbzzju>
 2 The Brecks, <https://tinyurl.com/r752up9e>
 3 The Brecks, <https://tinyurl.com/j4ajmw72>

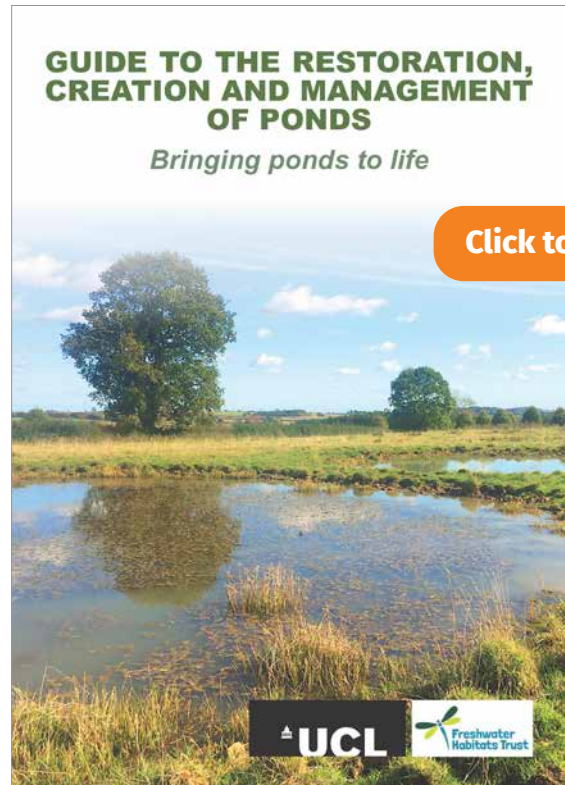
4 Suffolk Wildlife Trust, <https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/>
 5 Wildlife Live Webinar – Historical Ecology, <https://tinyurl.com/5a4whbb4>
 6 Pond Restoration, <https://wakelyns.co.uk/ponds/>

7 Sites of special scientific interest, <https://tinyurl.com/mufhtu5z>

Hidden Wetlands – Restoring Suffolk’s Ghost Ponds

Emma Aldous, SBIS

Across the agricultural heartlands of East Anglia, a quiet transformation is taking place. In the corners of fields, along ancient parish boundaries, and sometimes in the very middle of a barley crop, patches of water are reappearing. These are not new ponds, but old ones, brought back from a state of hibernation. They are known as ghost ponds: the lost aquatic habitats of Suffolk and Norfolk, which are now being systematically resurrected.



This is more than just a story of digging; it is one of ecological detective work, of biological time capsules, and of a farmer-led movement to re-water a landscape. The work, particularly in Suffolk, is restoring vital links in a fragmented ecosystem, demonstrating that habitats once thought permanently lost can be effectively recovered.

[The Origin of Ghost Ponds](#)

To understand these ghosts, we must look back to the mid-20th century. Before this, the Suffolk and Norfolk countryside was a mosaic of small, mixed farms, characterised by hedgerows and a high density of ponds. These were not just picturesque features; they were essential infrastructure. Ponds were dug for watering livestock, as a source of marl (lime-rich clay) to spread on acidic fields, for soaking wooden cartwheels, and for domestic use.

From the 1950s onwards, the drive for agricultural intensification changed the landscape forever. The post-war government encouraged maximum food production. This led to a policy of field rationalisation: hedges were removed to create

larger fields, and ponds were seen as inconvenient obstacles.

The most common fate was deliberate infilling. Countless ponds were filled with soil, rubble, and farm waste, then ploughed over and incorporated into arable fields. Their locations were forgotten, surviving only as faint circles on old maps or as damp depressions in the field. These are the true ghost ponds.

A second category also exists: zombie ponds. These were not filled in, simply abandoned. Left to nature, they became overgrown, choked by trees and scrub. The dense canopy blocked out light, the water filled with leaf litter, and the pond became dark, acidic, and largely lifeless – ecologically dead.

The result was a catastrophic loss of freshwater habitat. It is estimated that East Anglia, one of the driest regions in the UK, lost over 90 per cent of its farm ponds.

[Unlocking the Seed Bank](#)

The restoration of a ghost pond is a blend of historical research and careful excavation. It is not just digging a new hole.

[Finding the Ghosts](#)

The search begins with maps. Researchers and landowners consult 19th-century tithe maps and early Ordnance Survey charts to pinpoint the exact locations of lost ponds. This is often corroborated by observation. A filled-in pond, though ploughed for decades, often leaves a crop mark (a circular area where the crop grows differently) or a slight, shallow dip in the terrain.

[The Careful Excavation](#)

Once a site is confirmed, a digger is used. The goal is not to dig deep, but to carefully remove the plug of infill material – the soil and debris dumped in during the 1960s or 70s. The team stops digging the moment they hit a different layer: the original pond bed. This ancient sediment is usually darker, finer, and clearly distinct from the rough infill above it.

[The Biological Time Capsule](#)

This original mud layer is the key to the whole process. It is a dormant seed bank. For the decades the pond was buried, the seeds of former aquatic plants lay in dark, anoxic (oxygen-free) conditions. This state of suspended animation preserved them.

When the infill is removed, this ancient seed bank is re-exposed to rainwater and, crucially, to sunlight. This triggers a remarkable germination. Within a single season, the new pond can become colonised by a diverse range of native plants, many of which may not have been seen in the local area for fifty years or more. This process is so effective that no artificial planting is required. The pond, in essence, simply resurrects itself.

A Farmer-Led Movement

While the scientific principles were honed across the region, the story in Suffolk is notable for being a grassroots movement, often led by the farmers themselves.

Landowners, increasingly aware of biodiversity and sustainable farming, are the driving force. With organisations like the **Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT)** playing an important supporting role. The SWT assists farmers by providing ecological advice, specialist contractor support, and help in navigating the costs of pond restoration, which are often covered by conservation grants.

In the Waveney Valley, near Bungay, farmer John Sanderson has been a prominent example of this work, restoring several ghost ponds on his land. The restored ponds quickly become oases with the re-emerging plants being followed by a rapid colonisation of animal life.

Water beetles and pond skaters are often the first to fly in. Dragonflies and damselflies, masters of dispersal, soon arrive to lay their eggs. Most importantly, the ponds provide critical breeding habitat for amphibians. Common frogs, toads, and newts – including the highly protected **great crested newt** – will travel significant distances across farmland to find these resurrected water bodies.

The benefits extend beyond the water’s edge. The surge in aquatic insects provides a rich, high-

protein food source for bats and for farmland birds like swallows, house martins, and skylarks.

Pingos and Pioneering Science

Suffolk’s success is built on a foundation of scientific research, much of which was pioneered in neighbouring Norfolk. The **Norfolk Ponds Project (NPP)**, a collaboration involving the **UCL Pond Restoration Research Group** led by **Professor Carl Sayer**, has been hugely influential.

Sayer’s team conducted detailed research that proved the effectiveness of ghost pond restoration and documented the high value of even small farm ponds. Their work demonstrated that these hotspots support a disproportionately large amount of regional biodiversity.

The work in Norfolk also highlighted a special category of pond, found in the Brecks. Here, many of the ponds are pingos.

Pingos are not man-made. They are rare geological features, relics from the end of the last Ice Age. During this periglacial period, huge, subterranean lenses of ice formed, pushing up mounds of earth. When the climate warmed, these ice cores melted, causing the mounds to collapse and form a near-perfectly circular, water-filled depression.

The **Lost Ponds: Reinstating Ghost Pingos** project, in partnership with BFER and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, has focused on restoring these ancient wetlands. The results have been exceptional, with nine of the restored pingos now classed as **Priority Ponds** due to their plant life alone!

- **Botanical Return:** In restored pingos, rare and specialist plants have re-emerged from the seed bank. A celebrated case was the reappearance of Grass-poly (*Lythrum hyssopifolia*), a plant legally protected for its rarity

and thought to have been extinct in Norfolk for over a century.

- **Invertebrate Life:** Surveys of the resurrected pingos recorded high numbers of water beetles, including many species of conservation concern.

This targeted research in Norfolk provided the evidence and the methodology, giving conservation bodies and farmers in Suffolk the confidence to roll out restoration projects at scale.

From Ponds to a ‘Pondscape’

The restoration of a single pond is a local victory. The restoration of *hundreds* of ponds, which is the current goal, is a strategic act of landscape-scale ecological repair.

The true value lies in creating a pondscape. In a fragmented agricultural landscape, a single, isolated pond is vulnerable. Its population of newts or dragonflies could be wiped out by a single pollution event or a drought.

However, a *network* of ponds, acting as stepping stones, creates a resilient and connected habitat. Wildlife can move between them, repopulating ponds that have suffered a bad year and allowing for genetic exchange.

These restored wetlands also provide invaluable ecosystem services. They capture sediment and filter nutrient run-off from fields, improving water quality. They slow the flow of water during heavy rain, contributing to natural flood management. And, over time, the sediments in their beds act as efficient carbon sinks.

The story of Suffolk’s ghost ponds is an optimistic one. It shows that ecological damage need not be permanent. By looking back at old maps and trusting in the resilience of nature, landowners are re-stitching a vital, watery thread into the fabric of the countryside, and the ghosts are returning to life.

Publication of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Jennifer Burlingham, Nature Recovery Partnership Manager, SCC

The end of October 2025 marked the cumulation of nearly 3 years of collaborative work across Suffolk and Norfolk to create the first iteration of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Suffolk.

LNRSs are a part of a nationwide move to create the space and connectivity needed on land and sea for nature to thrive, recover and be resilient. Driven by the Environment Act of 2021 they aim to identify opportunities and priorities for nature restoration at the local level, and consist of:

- A local habitat map showing where valuable areas for nature are currently located
- A statement of biodiversity priorities – a locally agreed list of priority areas where new and improved habitats would bring the most benefit
- A map of locations and actions showing where and how habitats can be created and connected, and how the wider environment and economy can benefit.

Forty-eight LNRS are being created across the country – a handful have already been published this year, and we are pleased to join that group. The work conducted collaboratively by teams from Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils means that we have established a model for cross-border development and project achievement, which has been highly praised and recognised.

The main aims of the strategy can be summarised as follows:

- Restoring more habitats to **favourable condition**, particularly those that are fragmented or degraded.
- **Expanding the extent of priority habitats**, for example creating new wetlands, woodlands, and grasslands in strategic locations.

- **Strengthening connections** between habitats through ecological corridors, hedgerows, rivers, and coastal systems.
- **Improving conditions** for key species, ensuring their populations are stable or increasing.
- **Delivering wider benefits** such as carbon storage, flood protection, cleaner water, and healthier soils.

The work has been supported by a wide range of partners and stakeholders from across both counties and beyond, and has been steered by the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership (NSNRP). SBIS has been integral in terms of providing specialist advice, data and input to all aspects of the process, so a massive thank you to all involved.

Please visit the websites below to access the executive summary, final full strategy and mapping, and if you would like to become involved with the partnership, please contact lnrs@suffolk.gov.uk.

The NSNRP will continue to develop and evolve as we transition into the next stages of delivery and implementation. Defra have indicated that the Responsible Authorities (SCC and NCC) will have four main areas of focus:

1. Lead and convene a delivery partnership
2. Embed LNRS into local decision making
3. Identify strategic projects and facilitate project development
4. Monitor and report on delivery of LNRS priorities



This is the first iteration of the document, and, when instructed, the review and re-publication process will be completed, aiming to identify where projects have been successful and the impacts that have been achieved.

With the upcoming changes across our region over the next few years, and the potential role of the Mayoral Combined County Authority and new unitary council(s), we feel we have a very strong foundation from which to lead, support and drive nature recovery action across the region.

Use these links to find out more: [Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\) - Suffolk County Council Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership](#)

10 Key Ambitions of the Suffolk and Norfolk LNRS

1. **Create, enhance, and expand** priority habitats.
2. **Reconnect** fragmented landscapes.
3. **Recover and protect** key species.
4. **Support sustainable farming and land management.**
5. **Restore wetlands, rivers, and peatlands.**
6. **Safeguard and enhance** coastal habitats.
7. **Expand woodland and tree cover.**
8. **Integrate nature** into towns and cities.
9. **Empower** communities and landowners.
10. **Deliver co-benefits** for climate, health, and the economy

Reclaim the Rain

Sian Watson, Reclaim the Rain Assistant Project Manager

Reclaim the Rain' is a six-year-long joint Norfolk and Suffolk County Council project, funded by Defra as part of the Environment Agency's 'Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme' (FCRIP). Across both counties, we're working with six small rural communities to increase local resilience to the impacts of surface water flooding and drought by exploring new ways of working and opportunities to capture, store and reuse flood water.

Reclaim the Rain's aim is to reduce surface water flood risk to small rural communities, while also delivering wider environmental, social, and economic benefits. Our work includes practical solutions which have been co-created with residents, businesses, water users, and community groups to deliver schemes, which include flood storage basins, reservoirs, leaky dams, pond restoration, tree planting, and small-scale community sustainable water management features, such as SuDSPods and rain gardens. Each of these deliverables are designed not only to reduce surface water flood risk, but to demonstrate the value of reusing flood water to support the natural environment, agriculture and local recreation.

Ecological surveys have played a significant part in shaping and bringing these projects to life. Across Suffolk, we've carried out a wide range of assessments to investigate the presence of species such as badgers, bats, newts, water voles, reptiles, and more. These surveys helped us understand the ecological

value of the areas we're working in and ensure that we minimise disruption to existing species and habitats. In many cases, they've also allowed us to identify additional opportunities for habitat enhancement beyond the benefits that come from integrating sustainable water management, such as, stacking log piles, adding stages, scrapes and depth variations within the pond mosaic, utilising rain garden planting schemes to support pollinators during flood and drought conditions, and installing bird boxes.

We've worked closely with Suffolk County Council's Ecology Team and external consultants to minimise impact on valuable existing habitats as we move through project delivery.

This has included implementing reasonable avoidance measures, adapting plans or proposal areas to protect sensitive species, adjusting the timing of works to prevent disturbance during key

breeding or activity seasons, and ensuring each of our schemes will have a lasting positive environmental impact. There's ample opportunity to combine water management and ecology priorities, and this collaboration helps to create truly sustainable environments, supporting the needs of people and nature.

If you're interested in Reclaim the Rain's ongoing work, please visit our website at reclaimtherain.org or via our socials to learn more!



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Suffolk's Wallaby Mystery

Emma Aldous, SBIS

Wallaby (*Notamacropus rufogriseus*)
in its native home of Tasmania
© Dash Huang CC BY-NC-SA



The tranquil countryside of the Norfolk-Suffolk border has recently become the improbable stage for a piece of ecological drama. Around mid-August 2025, sightings of a wallaby began to emerge, injecting a bizarre Antipodean flavour into the East Anglian landscape. An initial report near Ilketshall St Andrew was quickly followed by another seven miles away in Wissett.

The creature's appearance, an animal traditionally confined to the world's most remote continent, has triggered a local response involving both Suffolk Police and the RSPCA, who are now coordinating efforts to track the animal while simultaneously fielding public inquiries and cautionary advice. The key message remains one of non-intervention: the public is urged not to approach the wallaby due to its unpredictable nature and defensive kicking mechanism, but rather to report its location to the authorities.

The incident, while locally sensational, is far from an isolated sighting in the UK. This wallaby, with its origins as yet unknown, highlights a much broader, question in British zoology: Is this an escaped pet, or the expansion of a nascent wild population?

Wallabies in Britain

The surprise of a wallaby in Suffolk quickly dissipates when viewed through the lens of zoological history. The UK has been host to small, localised, but surprisingly tenacious populations of introduced wallabies for over a century. The most prominent species is the Red-necked Wallaby (*Notamacropus rufogriseus*), specifically the Tasmanian sub-species (*N. r. rufogriseus*), which

appears to be remarkably well-suited to the British climate.

Their initial establishment can be traced back to private collections and zoos. A major release event occurred during the World Wars, when animals were often set free as facilities lacked the resources or security to maintain their collections. While a once-famous population in the Peak District is now thought to be extinct (having succumbed to harsh winters and human disturbance by the early 2000s), other colonies have proven more resilient. The Isle of Man, in particular, hosts a large, stable population – now estimated in the hundreds – descended from escapees from the Curragh's Wildlife Park in the 1970s. Smaller, less visible groups have also been documented elsewhere, including Scotland and, increasingly, in the south of England, with hotspots noted in areas like the Chiltern Hills and Cornwall.

Ecological Adaptability

The Red-necked Wallaby's success in establishing a foothold in Britain highlights its ecological flexibility. They are herbivores, with a diet consisting of grasses, roots, and shrubs. Crucially for wallabies, our abundance of similar vegetation – including heather, grasses, and

bracken – provides a consistent, year-round food source.

Furthermore, despite their Australian origins, the Tasmanian sub-species is generally accustomed to a cooler, more temperate climate than their mainland counterparts. This pre-adaptation, combined with a lack of natural predators in the UK (adults are rarely threatened, though young joeys can fall prey to domestic dogs or foxes), allows them to thrive where other exotic species might fail. Their typical behaviour as primarily nocturnal and solitary foragers also makes them difficult to spot, aiding their survival in a human-dominated landscape. This secretiveness suggests that current estimates of wild populations might be conservative.

Escapologist or Pioneer?

The wallaby roaming between Ilketshall St Andrew and Wissett presents a classic zoological conundrum. The immediate question for authorities like the RSPCA is whether the animal is an escaped pet from a private collector, or a pioneering individual from a yet-to-be-confirmed mainland breeding group.

Escaped Pet Hypothesis

Wallabies are popular, if unusual, choices for private collections in the UK, often kept in small paddocks or farms. Given their extraordinary ability to leap and their propensity for finding weaknesses in fencing, escapes

Region	Status	Estimated Population	Origin
Isle of Man	Established, Breeding	1,000+ (2017)	Zoo escapees (1970s)
Peak District	Extinct (Last sighting ~2009)	N/A	Zoo escapees (1940s)
Scotland (Loch Lomond)	Established, Localised	Small	Intentional introduction
Cornwall/Chilterns	Localised Sightings, Potential Breeding	Unknown	Zoo/private collection escapes
Suffolk/Norfolk	Transient/New Individual	One Confirmed	Unknown

Suffolk's Wallaby Mystery

are not uncommon. A single, disoriented animal appearing suddenly in an area not known for established colonies typically points to this scenario. The rapid succession of sightings – August 12th near Bungay, August 13th near Halesworth – suggests a stressed animal covering ground quickly.

Wild Population Hypothesis

The increasing number of wallaby sightings across Southern England, including confirmed instances of females with joeys, raises the possibility that small, self-sustaining populations are becoming more widespread. The East Anglian countryside, with its mix of farmland, woodland, and scrub, provides a habitat that closely mirrors the preferred cover of the species. A small, undetected group may exist in a secluded pocket of the county, or the Suffolk wallaby could be a dispersing male seeking new territory. The density of sightings in August, as noted in previous UK studies, is statistically a hotspot month for wallaby visibility; this may relate to seasonal changes in food availability or the dispersal of juvenile animals.

“The true mystery is not that an individual wallaby is in Suffolk, but that we still don't have a full understanding of the species' niche and population dynamics across the entire British mainland.” – Dr. Evelyn Reed, Conservation Biologist

A Public Service Announcement

The official advice issued by Suffolk Police and the RSPCA is not just a footnote – it is a critical directive informed by the animal's behaviour and the safety of the public.

- **Do Not Approach:** Wallabies, despite their seemingly docile appearance, are wild animals. They are generally shy, but if cornered or frightened, they will use their powerful hind legs to **kick defensively**. This is a

serious hazard to both people and domestic pets.

- **Maintain Distance and Observe:** The goal is to monitor the wallaby from a safe distance, ideally without it noticing, to prevent it from bolting and disappearing into dense cover. Accurate details on its location, direction of travel, and any distinguishing marks are crucial for a successful capture.
- **Immediate Reporting:** Contacting the authorities is essential. Wallabies are protected under the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981** in certain contexts, and their capture requires expert handling. Furthermore, if the wallaby is an escapee, it likely belongs to someone.

The authorities need to manage this as a public safety issue while also considering the welfare of the wallaby. A wild-born animal may simply be left to its own devices if it is not causing problems, as established colonies often are. However, a pet escapee or an animal in a vulnerable, high-traffic area will necessitate a controlled capture and relocation.

The Broader Implications

Wallabies across the UK, are a classic case study in introduced

species ecology. Unlike invasive species such as the grey squirrel, the Red-necked Wallaby has not yet exhibited traits that classify it as a serious ecological threat. Its population density remains low, and its diet appears to overlap with native herbivores without causing significant competitive pressure or habitat damage.

However, the scientific community remains cautious. The long-term impact on native ecosystems, particularly on fragile habitats or through the transmission of novel pathogens, is not yet fully understood. As climate change moderates UK winters, the range and population size of these non-native marsupials could expand further, potentially transforming them from naturalised novelties to more significant ecological actors.

For now, the Suffolk wallaby remains an object of curiosity – a bizarre, fleeting vision of the exotic in the everyday. However, it is a reminder that the lines between native, naturalised, and invasive species are perpetually in flux, and that the wild heart of Britain can to beat to a surprisingly Antipodean rhythm. Its capture, or its disappearance into the undergrowth, will only provide a momentary closing chapter to an ongoing zoological story.



Wallaby © Nik Borrow, CC BY-NC

The Rattlesden River CGS

Caroline Markham, GeoSuffolk

GeoSuffolk has designated a section of the Rattlesden River and its floodplain, in the grounds of the Food Museum in Stowmarket, a County Geodiversity Site.

The river rises in Bradfield Woods at 90m OD and joins the River Gipping 15km downstream at 60m – this low relief resulting in low energy levels. It flows over Anglian Till for its entire course, and this provides a high suspended load. Gravel terraces along the valley sides have not been exploited and there is no evidence of alterations to its channel for navigation. It is therefore representative of rivers on the 'High Suffolk' tills, initiated following the retreat of the Anglian ice sheet (about 450,000 years ago). The CGS is a 350m section of the river and floodplain, with two meanders of approx. 130m wavelength and amplitude, in a 200m floodplain. It is accessible to the public with an easy access path along the north bank.

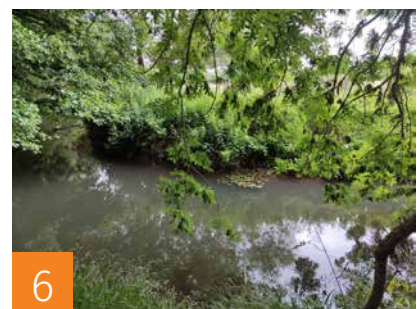
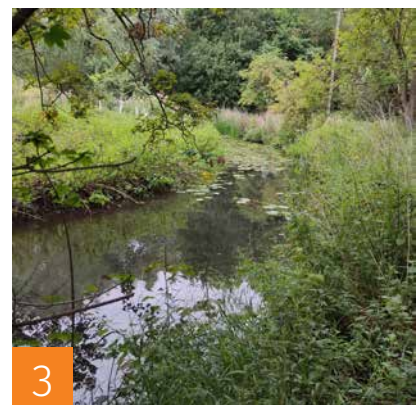


Photo 1 shows the foot bridge over the river near the east of the CGS. We estimated channel width here to be 7m – note the vegetated banks and slow flow of water.

Photo 2 looks south across the floodplain at the east end of the CGS. The footbridge denotes position of river. Investigations in the nearby Gipping floodplain suggest the present low energy regime began sometime after 7,000 BP.

Photo 3 looks west across the northern bend of one of the large meanders. The northern floodplain is wooded along this stretch.

Photo 4 taken at the western edge of the CGS. The footbridge over a ditch tributary denotes the end of the easy access path. The channel is about 6m wide and filled with vegetation (*Iris pseudacorus*) at this point.

The southern floodplain can be seen on the far side of the channel.

Photo 5 looks east along the easy access path. This has a composite underlay which makes pushchair/wheelchair access possible.

Photo 6 shows the south bank of the river near to the west end of the CGS. The high banks indicate low discharge (July 2025) and the high suspended load of clay particles from the till 'muddies' the water. Once lifted into suspension, clay particles require little energy for transportation – a high suspended load actually makes a river more efficient by damping down turbulent flow.

Photo 7 shows the northern edge of the floodplain with sand in the animal digging. This is the edge of one of the river terraces



formed during periods of higher energy flow in post-Anglian cold phases. These terraces are present along the Gipping valley downstream where some have been exploited for building material.



The Tin River: A small stream telling a big story

Emma Aldous, SBIS

Nestled in Bungay, at the heart of the Suffolk Broads, lies a watercourse with a name that piqued my curiosity: the Tin River.

With no grand embankments, or wide, navigable stretches, the Tin River can be easily missed as it winds through Bungay. A tributary of the River Waveney, this small, ephemeral stream dries up for months each year but comes to life in winter, running swiftly and sometimes overflowing its banks.

[A Town Cradled by Water](#)

Bungay occupies an 'island' formed by a tight meander of the River Waveney, which almost encircles the town. The land within this loop, and stretching out from it, is the low-lying Waveney Valley, the southern gateway to the Broads. For centuries, this landscape was a web of wet marshland, fen, and grazing commons. Water, therefore,

has always been central to life in Bungay. Not just the River Waveney, which acted as a highway and a source of power, but the myriad of smaller streams, drains, and ditches needed to make the land usable.

The Tin River is a vital part of the area's hydrology, draining water from Bungay Common into the wider Waveney system. Without streams like this, Bungay Common would be an impassable bog for much of the year. As a working stream, it forms a piece of living infrastructure that has shaped the very landscape of Bungay.

[The Mystery of a Name](#)

Why 'Tin'? Suffolk is not Cornwall; there are no tin mines here.

However, a visit soon reveals the origin of its name. "Tin River" comes from the corrugated metal sheets lining its banks. These sheets are believed to be re-purposed Anderson bomb shelters used post-World War II to combat bank erosion. This interesting naming context hints at the history and resilience of the local area.

[The Ecology of the Stream](#)

The River Waveney Trust is working to restore and revive freshwater habitats that have been impacted by industrialisation, urbanisation and agricultural intensification. Over the centuries the River Waveney and its tributaries have been straightened, dammed, deepened, reinforced, diverted, embanked, culverted and disconnected from their floodplains. These changes have significantly altered the way these waterways work, they are no longer able to cope with additional pressures from water pollution and

abstraction, they are less resilient to climate change and less able to support wildlife.

Returning rivers to a totally natural state isn't always possible, but there's a lot that can be done to help them thrive again. Partnering with local Rivers Trusts and conservation organisations, the River Waveney Trust is exploring opportunities to retain water on floodplains within the Tin River's catchment area. This strategy aims to slow water movement through the channel, ultimately reducing flood risk downstream and enhancing the natural habitat along the riverbanks.

In a landscape often dominated by intensive agriculture, small streams and drainage ditches, such as the Tin River, are emerging as vital wildlife corridors, supporting biodiversity in our region.

Amenity and Challenge

For the residents of Bungay, the Tin River has taken on a new role – one of amenity. Yet, this new involvement also presents challenges. The river's proximity to human activity exposes it to litter, plastic pollution, and dog waste, which enter the waterway, choking its natural flow and endangering local wildlife.

Small Stream, Big Lesson

Despite its humble size, the Tin River of Bungay conveys an lesson about the significance of seemingly minor features in our environment. Through its winding path, we gain insight into the geography of the Waveney Valley. Its name carries echoes of the wartime past, while its banks serve as shelters for various wildlife species. Furthermore, the river's

continued existence reflects the local community's commitment to preserving its landscape.

The Tin River invites us to look more closely at our surroundings. The next time you are walking through Bungay Common or exploring your local area, take a moment to appreciate the small streams, overgrown ditches, or less visible aspects of the landscape. They are the unsung heroes of our environment, often holding the entire narrative of the area within their gentle flow.



Sunbathing by Tin River!

Emily Winter, River Waveney Trust

The River Waveney Trust are in the early stages of developing a river restoration project on Tin River, a tributary of the River Waveney, that joins downstream of Bungay Loop.

The River Waveney Trust are working with the team at Carlton House Farm, who have a meadow that borders Tin River to find ways to improve biodiversity and restore natural river processes at that site. In preparation for the project ecological surveys have been carried out to establish what lives there already.

This is where our newest volunteer Steve Plumb comes in, he's been out checking eighteen reptile refuges that have been set out on the banks of Tin River, on the second day of surveying he spotted three common lizards basking in the sun.

I've been speaking to Steve about his experience volunteering with us.

What motivated you to contact River Waveney Trust to volunteer?

I'm currently having a bit of an employment sabbatical - so I was looking for something new to keep me busy and my brain ticking over in between jobs. I came across a friend tagged in one of your social media posts and was intrigued by the wonderful work that you do locally. I saw a recent request for volunteers and applied - and was given a warm welcome.

What's been the highlight so far?

I am naturally curious to learn new things - so it's great being able to

learn about habitats and reptile behaviour. My family all think I'm a reptile expert now! (thank you YouTube). The biggest highlight has been seeing Common Lizards out basking on our survey matts/refuges. According to what I've read, it's a rare occurrence to see any at all. One day there were five all basking on one refuge - beautiful, astonishing and gratifying.

What would you say to someone else who's thinking about volunteering?

I'd say do it. The team are all very friendly (and constantly grateful for anyone's help). I think there's a good chance I'll be involved for a while now - I'm hooked. It's very rewarding, and it's great to contribute to something local to me.

Visit the [River Waveney Trust](https://www.riverwaveneytrust.org.uk) to learn more about volunteering



Improving River Habitat and Connectivity at Little Bealings

Luke Farnish, Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust

A package of restoration works has been successfully delivered on the River Fynn at Little Bealings, aiming to reduce sediment input, protect riverbanks, and enhance habitat for fish and other wildlife.

The project was developed in partnership between the Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust (ESRT) and the Environment Agency (EA), and the landowner at Little Bealings. Originally scheduled for delivery in the financial year 2023/24 under the Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF), the project was postponed due to prolonged wet weather and unsuitable ground conditions. Delivery was completed in October of 2024 with support of new EA WEIF funding.

The completed works include the installation of a new cattle crossing (with fencing) to replace a heavily used informal crossing point, which had been causing poaching of the riverbank and increased sedimentation of the river. In addition, bank repairs have now

stabilised the area and reduced the risk of further significant damage from livestock access.

To improve river habitat and natural processes, woody revetments were installed just upstream of the crossing. These features help to narrow and re-shape the channel, increasing flow over the crossing to reduce sediment build up and supporting aquatic life. In addition, two new gravel beds have been created to provide important spawning grounds for fish, enhancing the ecological potential of this stretch of the River Fynn.

This project not only addresses immediate pressures from agricultural use but also delivers long-term benefits for river health, water quality, and biodiversity. By reducing sediment input and improving instream habitat, the river is now better protected and more resilient for the future. This project is a strong example of collaborative action to improve river environments through practical, targeted restoration.

Partners: Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust, Environment Agency

Funding: Water Environment Improvement Fund.





Owl Be Back

A Look at a Challenging Breeding Season

Amber Hany, The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary & Nature Centre

At the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, we operate the Wild Owl Nest Box Scheme, which provides safe and secure nesting sites for Barn Owls, Tawny Owls, Little Owls, and Kestrels. Our team regularly monitors these boxes and works with a licensed bird ringer & trainer, to ring both adult birds and their young, contributing valuable data to national monitoring efforts.

Each species has distinct breeding habits and habitat preferences:

- Barn Owls typically breed from March to August, favouring open habitats such as farmland.
- Tawny Owls breed from late winter to spring, preferring broad-leaved and deciduous woodlands.
- Little Owls breed from March to August in open landscapes, including farmland, parkland, and orchards.
- Kestrels breed from March to September, in open areas where cavities are available for nesting.

Unfortunately, this year has proven to be a challenging one for breeding success in the boxes that we monitor. We recorded only one successful brood each for Barn Owls, Kestrels, and Tawny Owls.

Several environmental factors may explain this poor outcome. A shortage of prey, particularly

short-tailed field voles, led to reduced food availability. The dry spring limited grass growth, which in turn diminished food sources for voles and other small mammals. As a result, owls struggled to find sufficient prey which meant they were not able to reach breeding weight. For those that managed to breed, there was a lack of food to sustain themselves and their young.

Compounding the issue, a wet winter followed by a dry spring created unfavourable conditions for these species. Wet weather limits hunting for Barn Owls, whose feathers are not waterproof, while subsequent dry conditions further reduced prey numbers. Some reports from across the country indicate that Tawny and Barn Owls had a very poor breeding season.

We have also observed fewer admissions of nestlings to our Raptor Hospital, where we rescue and rehabilitate orphaned and

injured birds of prey. This decline likely mirrors the reduced breeding success in the wild, further highlighting the difficult breeding conditions experienced this year.

However, amidst these challenges, we recorded some positive activity from an often overlooked species – the Stock Dove. This year, four Stock Doves were ringed in our nest boxes, and many more were monitored using the boxes. Although less well-known than the raptors, their presence is encouraging, particularly given their Amber conservation status and the UK being an international stronghold for the species

As the year draws to a close, our team will be heading out over the winter months to erect more nest boxes and inspect, repair, & maintain our network. Regular maintenance ensures that the boxes remain safe and suitable for breeding, giving our local owl and kestrel populations the best possible start when the next breeding season begins. We remain hopeful that the weather conditions and greater prey availability will support a far more successful season next year.

[Suffolk Owl Sanctuary website](#)



House Martin © Jan Thomas Landgren, CC BY-NC-ND.jpg

New App for Recording House Martins

House Martin Conservation UK & Ireland introduces its “Mapper App” to harness the power of citizen science.

House Martin Conservation UK & Ireland has announced the launch of its new “Mapper App.” This powerful and user-friendly application empowers the public to become citizen scientists, enabling them to easily record sightings and nest locations of these remarkable birds. The data gathered will provide a crucial insight into their populations and aid their conservation.

The house martin, an aerial acrobat whose arrival heralds the beginning of summer, is in sharp decline. This small bird, known for its glossy blue-black upper parts and pure white underparts, is now on the ‘Red List’ for conservation concern. This is the highest level of alert, signifying a severe and urgent need for conservation action to prevent the species from disappearing from our skies.

The House Martin’s Plight

For centuries, house martins have been our neighbours, building their intricate mud-cup nests under the eaves of our homes and buildings. Their cheerful, chattering calls are a delightful part of the summer soundscape. Yet, recent decades have seen

their numbers fall dramatically. The reasons for this decline are complex and not yet fully understood, which is precisely why new data is so desperately needed.

“The Red-Listing of the house martin was a shock for many, but for those on the ground, it confirmed what we have suspected for years,” said a spokesperson for House Martin Conservation UK & Ireland. “These birds are in serious trouble. Their journey here is fraught with danger, and when they arrive, they are finding it harder to survive and raise their young.”

Complex Causes for a Steep Decline

Several factors are believed to contribute to the house martin’s struggle. Most significant is the reduction in their food source: flying insects. Widespread insect declines, mean less food is available for adult birds and their chicks.

Changes in building design and materials have also had a major impact. Modern homes and offices, with their clean lines, plastic uPVC soffits, and sealed eaves, offer few suitable surfaces for house martins to attach their nests.

Furthermore, nests are sometimes deliberately knocked down due to a misunderstanding over droppings, an act that is illegal while the nest is active and devastating for the birds.

Their epic 11,000km round-trip migration to sub-Saharan Africa presents its own challenges: navigating extreme weather, crossing the Sahara Desert, and finding enough food and water along the way. Increased desertification and drought has made this journey even more perilous than ever.

A Digital Solution

The new Mapper App is designed to fill the gaps in our knowledge. By allowing users to log sightings, monitor active nests, and report colony sizes, the app will help build the most comprehensive map of house martin populations to date.

“This data is absolutely essential,” the spokesperson continued. “It will help us identify key breeding hotspots and, just as importantly, ‘coldspots’ where martins have vanished. We can analyse this data against environmental factors to understand what makes a successful breeding site. Are they near water? Are they on older buildings? Are they in urban or rural areas? These are the questions the public can help us answer.”

This information is vital for targeting conservation efforts where they are needed most, allowing the charity and its partners to protect important colonies, advise homeowners, and guide local planning decisions.

[From Citizen Scientist to Active Conservationist](#)

The public's involvement does not have to end with logging a sighting. The charity is urging people to take practical steps to make their homes and communities 'martin-friendly'.

"Downloading the app is a fantastic first step, but you can do even more," said the spokesperson. "One of the biggest problems for martins is a lack of building materials. They build their nests from mud, collecting beakful after beakful from puddles and pond edges. A simple, damp patch of earth in your garden can make all the difference."

For those in homes with unsuitable eaves, artificial nest cups are an excellent solution. These ready-made nests provide a secure and immediate home for returning birds, encouraging them to settle. The charity advises placing them high under the eaves, ideally on a north or east-facing wall to avoid the hottest summer sun.

The charity also hopes to foster a greater tolerance for the birds. "A small amount of droppings is a small price to pay for the joy these birds bring. A simple board placed 60cm below the nest can catch the mess, which is a brilliant compost activator. We need to see them as tenants, not pests."

[A National Effort to Save a National Treasure](#)

The charity aims to halt and ultimately reverse the decline of the species, working to raise

awareness, encouraging communities to take action, and providing resources for the care of sick or injured birds.



"We know shockingly little about these birds, including the exact routes they take to Africa and where they spend the winter," the spokesperson concluded. "This app is a game-changer. It allows us to crowdsource a massive dataset that would be impossible for a small team to collect. Every single sighting logged, from a single bird to a thriving colony, is a vital piece of the puzzle."

[Visit the House Martin Conservation UK & Ireland website](#)

£10 Million Fund to Enhance and Protect Suffolk's Natural Landscape

A new grant scheme, the Natural Environment Improvement Fund (NEIF), has been established to invest nearly £10 million in the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape (SECHNL) and the Suffolk Heritage Coast.

The fund, financed by Sizewell C and delivered by the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape, is a key part of the mitigation and compensation measures for the Sizewell C Project.

NEIF will support projects that conserve and enhance the region's unique landscape character, improve biodiversity, and boost habitat resilience.

[Key details](#)

- **Total Funding:** Nearly £10 million, with over £6.2 million available during the Sizewell C

construction period and £3.5 million available for three years post-construction.

- **Geographic Focus:** The fund will prioritize the SECHNL and Suffolk Heritage Coast within East Suffolk. At least 50% of the fund is allocated to projects within this area.
- **Primary Goals:**
 - Mitigate the landscape and visual impacts of the Sizewell C Project.
 - Deliver sustainable, long-term management of woodlands, hedges, and other established vegetation.
 - Enhance local ecology, biodiversity, and wildlife habitat connectivity.
- **Who Can Apply:** Applications are welcome from registered charities, landowners, community groups, voluntary organisations, public bodies, and individuals or businesses whose

projects demonstrate a clear benefit to the wider community. Partnership working is strongly encouraged.

- **Governance:** The fund is overseen by The Natural Environment Awards Panel, which includes representatives from East Suffolk Council, Suffolk County Council, Natural England, the SECHNL Partnership, and Sizewell C.

Potential applicants are advised to contact the Natural Environment Improvement Project Officer in the first instance. The application process begins with submitting an Expression of Interest (EOI).

For full details on application criteria, eligibility, and the application process, please visit the [Natural Environment Improvement Fund](#) or contact neif@suffolkandessex-nl.org.uk.

National Landscape Awards

Tom Fairbrother, National Landscapes

PACE Manningtree (Practical Actions for Climate and the Environment) won the Robert Erith National Landscape Award 2025 for its volunteer Water Quality Team's outstanding work protecting the River Stour.



The annual award, celebrates exceptional contributions to conserving and enhancing the National Landscape and Stour Valley. Judges voted unanimously for PACE, praising the team's commitment to monitoring the river monthly in all weathers for over three years.

PACE, a charity founded in Manningtree, works with local people on practical, community-led projects to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss. Armed with waders, nets, and sampling bottles, PACE volunteers check the river at five sites between Langham and Dedham. Their surveys reveal river health, spot problems early, and gather vital pollution evidence.

John Hall, project coordinator, said: "The data we collect is like an early-warning system – it shows where pollution is affecting wildlife and where it could put the river and its users at risk. This award is fantastic recognition of their hard work."

The River Stour is under pressure from sewage spills, agricultural run-off, and road pollution. PACE has flagged three pollution incidents, allowing Environment Agency ecologists to take action. PACE also partners with the University of Essex to track harmful bacteria (*E. coli*, *Enterococcus*).

Cllr James Finch, Chairman of Dedham Vale National Landscape Partnership said: "PACE's Water

Quality Team is an outstanding example of what dedicated volunteers can achieve. Their work is invaluable for the long-term health of the Stour."

The award was presented by Cllr James Finch and Robert Erith BEM TD DL at The Boatyard, Dedham. PACE then took a "beautiful, peaceful trip" to Flatford and back on the electric boat *Maria Constable*, spotting a Kingfisher, other river wildlife, and heritage features like the Lintel Lock at Flatford.

Find out more about the Award at dedhamvale-NL.org.uk/awards. Learn more about the work of PACE at pacemanningtree.org.uk

Derek and Lesley Walduck have been named 2025 winners of the David Wood National Landscape Award for their inspirational work leading the GreenSnape Community Group.



The annual award recognizes outstanding contributions to the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape. *GreenSnape* Community Group, founded in 2017, works to protect and enhance the Snape environment.

Inspired by Derek and Lesley, the group now has 115 members (in a village of 650), raising thousands in donations and grants for volunteer-led projects. *GreenSnape's* achievements include landscape-scale projects restoring and enhancing Snape Common, Priory Wood, the village green, and verges. They also organize conservation work parties, events, talks, and visits.

Nick Collinson, Chair of the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape Partnership, said: "*GreenSnape* stands as a powerful example of what passionate, dedicated volunteers can achieve when united by a common goal. Their work has brought a community together and will leave a lasting legacy on the landscape, wildlife, and village life."

Derek and Lesley said: "We're very honoured to receive such a prestigious award and also very grateful to National Landscape for their support over the years, especially with a number of generous grants. We're very proud of our *GreenSnape* committee and

volunteers for all their hard work and commitment. We have a great community in Snape with many supportive groups that we enjoy working with, in particular, Snape Parish Council, the Churchyard team and Snape School. It's important at a time when our area is so much under threat from energy infrastructure that we all do what we can to help our beleaguered environment at a local level."

The award is named after David Wood, who was Chairman of the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape for over 20 years. Find out more about the Award at coastandheaths-NL.org.uk/awards.



Webinars, Training and Events



Botanical
Society of
Britain &
Ireland

Recordings of
the BSBI
webinars are
now available
on their
YouTube channel

BSBI – Botanical Skills Webinars



**Getting started with
Flower Anatomy**



**Getting started
with Plant Keys**



**An Introduction
to Equisetum**



**Grasses and
grassland habitats**



**Getting started with
Plant Anatomy**



**Lepidoptera
and Plants**



**Dryopteris in
Northern Ireland**



**Beginners Grasses,
Sedges & Rushes**



**Getting started
with Cotoneasters**

Suffolk Wildlife Trust

- Talk: What Would We Do Without Wasps • 13 Nov • Southwold Arts Centre
- Winter Guided Walk at Carlton Marshes • 17 Nov • Carlton Marshes
- Talk: African wildlife adventure • 18 Nov • Felixstowe
- Guided monthly walk: Winter wildlife • 23 Nov • Foxburrow
- Talk: "Great European Wetlands" • 25 Nov • The Lophams Village Hall
- **Wildlife Live Webinar - Small mammal ID • 25 Nov • Online**
- Talk: The Rural Crime team • 26 Nov • Ipswich
- Talk: The new reserve at Worlingham Marshes • 26 Nov • Stowmarket
- An introduction to Wading Birds at Martlesham Wilds • 29 Nov • Martlesham Wilds
- **Wildlife Live Webinar - Webcam wonders • 8 Dec • Online**
- Talk: The secret life of swifts • 10 Dec • Ipswich
- Wildlife Walk • 10 Dec • Lackford Lakes
- Talk: Botanical tour of Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserves • 16 Dec • Felixstowe
- Talk: Winged Wonders - Why are insects important • 18 Dec • Woodbridge
- New Years Day Guided Walk • 1 Jan • Carlton Marshes
- Talk: Fascination of Fungi with local naturalist Tony Brown • 8 Jan • Southwold
- Bedtime at Lackford Lakes • 10 Jan • Lackford Lakes
- Winter Tree ID • 10 Jan • Bradfield Woods
- Talk: The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary • 13 Jan • Leiston
- Wildlife Walk • 14 Jan • Lackford Lakes
- Talk: A Local Regenerative Farm • 14 Jan • Haverhill
- Talk: Wildlife in East Anglia Talk • 15 Jan • Woodbridge
- Wildlife Photography Talk • 22 Jan • Carlton Marshes
- Workshop: Winter bird photography • 24 Jan • Lackford Lakes
- **Wildlife Live Webinar - Bird Pellets • 27 Jan • Online**
- Warden Walk at Lackford Lakes • 30 Jan • Lackford Lakes
- World Wetland Day Guided Walk • 2 Feb • Carlton Marshes
- **Wildlife Live Webinar - White Tailed Eagles • 9 Feb • Online**
- Guided monthly walk: Love birds • 22 Feb • Foxburrow
- **Wildlife Live Webinar - Ancient Woodland in Suffolk • 24 Feb • Online**
- Talk: Creating Resilient Landscapes on the Suffolk Coast • 26 Feb • Woodbridge
- **Wildlife Live Webinar - Biofluorescence • 11 Mar • Online**

Details of all SWT events:

<https://www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/events>



Field Studies Council Courses

- Bee Nesting Ecology • Online • 17 Nov – 15 Dec • £20.00
- An Introduction to Woodland Habitats with Jackie Symmons • Online • 3 Dec • £10.00
- Riparian Woodland Lichens with Petra Vergunst • Online • 16 Jan • £10.00
- What is QGIS? • Online • 16 Jan – 13 Feb • £20.00
- Discovering UK Otters: Biology, Ecology and Conservation • Online • 20 Jan – 24 Feb • £45.00
- Identifying Broadleaf Trees in Winter • Online • 26 Jan – 2 Mar • £20.00
- Biodiversity Net Gain for Reviewers • Online • 26 Jan – 9 Mar • £100.00
- Bee Conservation • Online • 2 Feb – 2 Mar • £12.50
- Discovering Lichens • Online • 3 Feb – 17 Mar • £60.00
- Discovering QGIS • Online • 13 Feb – 27 Mar • £80.00
- Discovering Beetles • Online • 26 Feb – 2 Apr • £20.00
- Introduction to Amphibian Surveying with John Wilkinson • Online • 6 Mar • £10.00
- Discovering Garden Birds: Identification and Ecology • Online • 10 Mar – 21 Apr • £20.00
- Introduction to Reptile Surveying with John Wilkinson • Online • 13 Mar • £10.00
- Biodiversity Net Gain for Reviewers • Online • 23 Mar – 4 May • £100.00

Natural History Courses

Covering all aspects of the natural world for beginners, enthusiasts, volunteer recorders and professionals.

www.field-studies-council.org/fsc-natural-history-courses

Professional Development for Ecologists and Conservationists

An extensive range of courses that cater to a range of career levels, providing wildlife identification and surveying courses in many subjects.

www.field-studies-council.org/biodiversity/professional-development

Biological Recording Company

- Hedgehog Research Virtual Symposium • 24 Nov
- Innovative Moth Monitoring • 24 Nov
- Surveying For Beetles • 25 Nov
- Making the Most of Bird Sounds • 26 Nov
- The Shining Guest Ant • 3 Dec
- The Key to the Queendom • 8 Dec
- Ferns of the UK: Male & Buckler Ferns • 16 Dec
- Arboreal Harvestmen • 30 Dec
- Identifying Mosses • 6 Jan
- Understanding a Bee's Buzz • 13 Jan
- Wildlife Gardening Symposium 2026 • 14 Jan
- Introduction To Camera Trapping • 22 Jan
- An 'Alien' in Antarctica • 27 Jan
- Hay Meadow Restoration • 29 Jan
- Subterranean Harvestmen • 5 Feb
- Mapping the Beetle Tree of Life • 17 Feb
- Deploying Camera Traps • 19 Feb
- Antarctic Invertebrates • 5 Mar
- Biodiversity Net Gain Symposium 2026 • 18 Mar

Details of all BRC events:

www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/the-biological-recording-company-35982868173

The Species Recovery Trust

Online courses

- Invasive Species • 17 Nov
- Around Britain in 25 Sedges • 24 Nov
- UK Wildlife and The Law • 1 Dec
- Around Britain in 25 Grasses • 8 Dec
- Winter Tree ID • 15 Dec
- Badger Ecology, Survey and Mitigation • 8 Jan
- Around Britain in 25 Grasses • 12 Jan
- Around Britain in 30 Bryophytes • 19 Jan
- Around Britain in 20 Ferns and their Allies • 22 Jan
- Around Britain in 20 Rushes Online • 26 Jan
- How to Survey and Assess Hedgerows using the Hedgerow Regulations • 29 Jan
- Grasses Part Two • 2 Feb
- Great Crested Newts - Ecology, Conservation and Survey • 5 Feb
- Woodlands - Botanical Survey Online • 9 Feb

Details of all SRT courses:

www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/the-species-recovery-trust-17335753729

The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers

brecks.org/events/

London Natural History Society

www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/london-natural-history-society-30790245484

Royal Entomological Society

<https://www.royensoc.co.uk/events>

National Biodiversity Network

<https://nbn.org.uk/news-events-publications/upcoming-events>

Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service, The Hold, 131 Fore St, Ipswich IP4 1LR

