SBIS Newsletter

Beaver © dennisbehm, Flickr

Spring 2026

Suffolk's wildlife, our stories — Spring 2026

Features

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Researching God's Acre: The Biodiversity of British Churchyards • Ancient grasslands, rare lichens, and roosting bats, churchyards are vital wildlife refuges. → Page 19

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The Orford Inshore Marine Conservation Zone • 14 km offshore, a 72 kilometre square protected zone safeguards the North Sea's hidden biodiversity. → Page 14

Field Notes: Meet the People Protecting Suffolk • This issue: Hannah Alred, the GIS officer turning blank spaces on a map into a vision for a wilder, more connected Suffolk. → Page 33

Conservation News

Species and Science

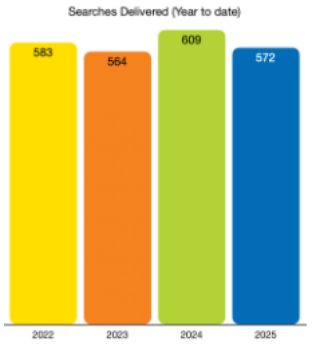
Data and Resources

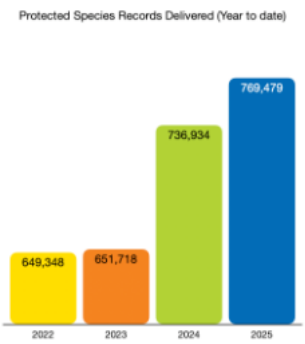
Learning and Events

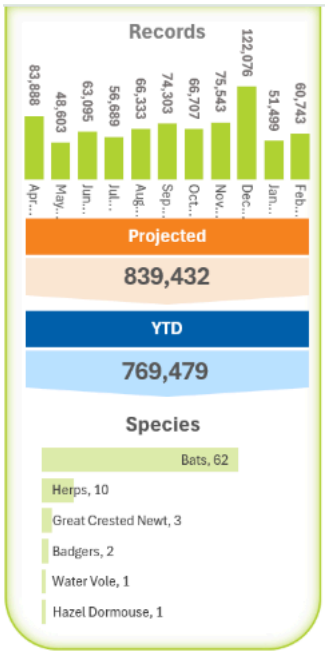
SBIS News

Commercial Data Enquiries

From the start of April 2025, we have processed **572 searches**, and supplied **769,479 species records**. This equates to an average of 12 searches a week with 1,345 records per search.







Projects

Lidar-derived tree canopy polygon data

Data generated for hedgerows is now available on our **Hedgerow Portal**; 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. Behind the scenes we have been working on improving the CWS workspace, creating a new data hub that all our CWS panel members can access and update.

Data updates for SLA Partners

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

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

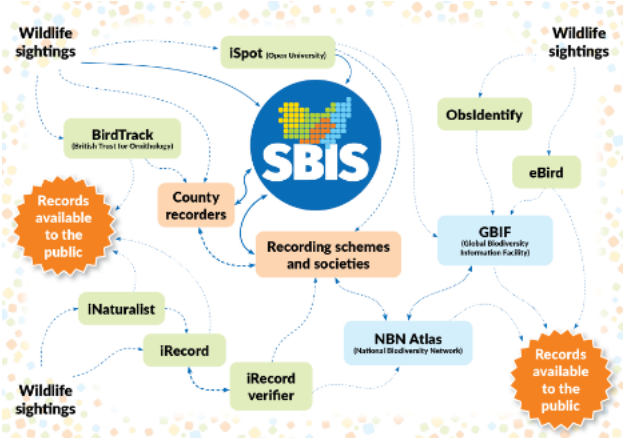
In October 2025, Natural England approved and published the Ancient Woodland Inventory for Suffolk following work done by SBIS to research and update this dataset.

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?



Suffolk's Natural Environment Team

Suffolk's natural landscapes – from ancient Breckland heaths to sweeping coastal marshes – are among the most distinctive in England. Safeguarding and enhancing these precious environments is the work of Suffolk County Council's Natural Environment Team.

The team brings together seven areas of expertise. The **Arboriculture** department cares for Suffolk's trees and woodland, while **Ecology** provides expert guidance on wildlife and habitats across the county. The **Landscapes** team works to protect and improve the character of the wider countryside. Two nationally designated areas – **Dedham Vale** and the **Suffolk Coast and Heaths** – are managed through the **National Landscapes** service. The **Brecks Landscape Partnership** champions one of England's most remarkable and rare landscapes, straddling Suffolk and Norfolk. The **Local Nature Recovery Partnership** drives collaborative efforts to restore and connect nature at scale, and the **Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service** underpins it all by collecting, managing, and sharing vital data on the county's wildlife.

Together, these teams form a comprehensive unit, working across boundaries of land, ownership, and discipline to ensure that our natural environment thrives for generations to come.

News updates

The Suffolk Tree Warden Network's Radio 4 programme, '**Black Poplars: How to Save a Tree**,' featured SBIS and their work together to record, map, and support black poplar trees. David Appleton leads the Native Black Poplar project, which focuses on mapping where these trees grow and helping with nursery and planting efforts.

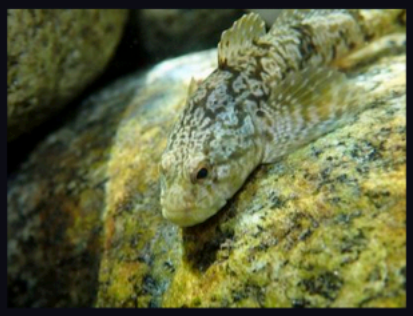
The Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership is pleased to begin delivering and implementing the LNRS. This step follows joint discussions and support from Defra, Natural England, the Environment Agency, and the Forestry Commission. Visit the LNRS **website** to find the full strategy, executive summary, mapping tool, supporting documents, and a video celebrating our progress. If you have questions, please **contact the LNRS team**.

The SBIS Species of the Month

Explore some of Suffolk's fascinating wildlife species with us

Click to read

1 Mar 2026: Heather beetle



2 Feb 2026: Bullhead

3 Jan 2026: Dog Pelt Lichen

4 Dec 2025: Wren

5 Nov 2025: Stoat

6 Oct 2025: Speckled Bush-cricket

Find them on our **Knowledge Hub**

Thorpeness
© Colin Barley Photography

Suffolk's Shifting Coastline: Adapting to Climate Change

Emma Aldous, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

Suffolk's coastline runs from the tranquil estuaries of the Stour and Orwell in the south to the dynamic cliffs and low-lying marshes of the north. This landscape is shaped by powerful estuarine processes, isostatic rebound (the sinking of the land mass), and the relentless erosive action of the North Sea.

A Coastline in Transition

The county's soft cliffs and shingle beaches form one of the most dynamic shorelines in Europe. Today, climate change is intensifying this natural dynamism, presenting an existential challenge to coastal communities, heritage sites, and fragile habitats. In Thorpeness, the vulnerability of the Suffolk coastline has become increasingly apparent with the retreat of the soft sandstone cliffs accelerating, leading to the rapid loss of several metres of land. This ongoing erosion has directly threatened coastal properties and infrastructure, necessitating emergency sea defence repairs and highlighting the immediate challenges posed by coastal change in the region. [**Drone footage of the coastal erosion at Thorpeness**]

The impacts of climate change in East Anglia are predicted to be stark: models suggest a significant increase in average summer temperatures and a rise in winter rainfall – leading to more flooding, and sea level rise accelerating. Sea level rise increases the coastline's exposure to erosive forces and makes coastal flooding more frequent and severe. It is within this context that the policy of coastal adaptation has moved from a theoretical exercise to an on-the-ground necessity. Adaptation is now considered essential in areas where "Hold the Line" policies are no longer economically viable, socially desirable, or environmentally sustainable.

The Four Pillars of Coastal Management Policy

Coastal management in Suffolk is framed by the policies established in Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs). These non-statutory but high-level frameworks define the long-term approach to managing flood and coastal erosion risk along specific stretches of the coast. They outline four key approaches for managing the coast over short-, medium-, and long-term time scales (up to 2105).

The most interventionist policy is Advance the Line, which involves building new defences seaward of existing ones, though this is rare on the soft coast of Suffolk.

The traditional policy is Hold the Line (HTL), in which existing defences are maintained, upgraded, or replaced in place. However, in many areas, particularly along the soft, eroding cliffs, this approach is becoming unsustainable.

The No Active Intervention (NAI) policy is a decision not to invest in the provision or maintenance of defences. This allows the shoreline to evolve naturally, even though it will inevitably increase the risk of flooding or erosion to land and property. For some areas, this is the only realistic long-term outcome.

Managed Realignment (MR) is a strategic, planned approach that allows the shoreline to realign, either forward or backwards, with management in place to control or limit the movement. This typically applies to low-lying areas at risk of flooding, such as grazing marshes, but can also involve slowing the recession of cliff areas. Managed Realignment often involves sacrificing existing land to create space for new habitats, such as salt marsh and mudflats, which then act as natural flood defences for land further inland.

The Suffolk Adaptation Framework in Practice

Coastal adaptation in Suffolk is a hybrid policy approach, combining local decision-centric planning with a focus on vulnerability. The overall aim is to increase resilience to coastal change and, wherever possible, help protect households and the local economy.

Shoreline Management Plans and Rollback: The plans recognise that under managed realignment and no active intervention policies, the long-term loss of land, homes, businesses, and infrastructure is a real possibility. Local Authorities, often coordinated by groups like Coastal Partnership East (CPE) – which oversees 92 km of coastline from Holkham to Landguard Point – work with local communities to address these challenges.

Key tools for adaptation include "rollback" and "relocation." The Defra 'Coastal Change Pathfinder' programme highlights this innovative land use planning. It aims to avoid "lock-ins," where new developments require future defence at unsustainable costs. In areas such as Easton Bavents and East Lane Bawdsey in East Suffolk, and the successful Happisburgh project in North Norfolk, the rollback method has been tested. It involves buying and demolishing vulnerable homes and then allowing new development outside risk areas. This anticipatory planning is often more economically viable and sustainable than constant defence.

Planning and Policy Integration: The adoption of a joint Coastal Adaptation Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) by East Suffolk Council and its partners in Norfolk is a significant step. This document does not change planning policies, but it provides crucial, detailed guidance for residents, developers, and landowners on implementing existing policies within Coastal Change Management Areas – zones identified as at risk of coastal change, and the document provides advice on relocating away from these areas and on enabling development that can generate finance to fund a rollback scheme.

Habitat Creation and Natural Defences: A fundamental tenet of ecological adaptation is the creation of natural buffer zones. Salt marshes, mudflats, and dunes act as green infrastructure. They dissipate wave energy and reduce the height of tidal surges. The Environment Agency increasingly funds natural defences. New programmes aim to boost resilience using nature-based solutions.

Managed Realignment often creates new salt marsh and intertidal habitats. This involves breaching old, failing embankments, allowing seawater to flood low-lying agricultural land. The land then becomes a functional, biodiverse habitat. Such projects are vital for coastal defence. They also support the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) by expanding habitats and connecting ecological corridors.

The LNRS and Resilience: The wider Suffolk Climate Action Plan and the subsequent Environmental Impact Strategy reaffirm the commitment to addressing the climate and nature emergencies. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy is instrumental here, providing the strategic map to create the space and connectivity needed for nature to thrive. By identifying strategic locations for creating new wetlands, woodlands, and grasslands, the strategy directly contributes to flood protection, cleaner water, and carbon storage – key co-benefits that underpin successful climate adaptation.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

Implementing coastal adaptation faces many challenges. Funding, public perception, and hard political decisions make it especially difficult.

The Financial Barrier: Funding for adaptation measures in the past has been opaque when compared to traditional hard coastal defence. While Defra and the Environment Agency have launched new investment plans and an adaptation pathway programme with substantial funding, the long-term resourcing of schemes such as property rollback remains a contentious issue. Coastal authorities must now work within a Partnership Funding model, which requires leveraging various sources

Bawdsey © Colin Barley Photography

of finance, often proving to be a barrier to the full delivery of adaptation policies.

The Social and Political Hurdle: The policy of Managed Realignment and No Active Intervention inevitably entails social cost – the planned, strategic loss of land, businesses, and, crucially, homes. This requires a fundamental shift in thinking for both government and affected communities. Success hinges on robust stakeholder engagement and working with local communities to increase their understanding of the risks and their responsibilities in taking action. Local authorities must provide clear, strong guidance to help people navigate the uncertainty of coastal change.

Monitoring and Data: The results of adaptation must be monitored. There is a recognised gap in routine, national data collection on losses and adaptation actions. The Environment Agency continues to supervise and manage risks. Its strategies promote climate-resilient places and infrastructure.

Suffolk's coastal future demands innovation and acceptance of change. Hybrid frameworks, anticipatory planning, and adaptation in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy all represent a mature response to climate change. The shifting sands of Suffolk are not just eroding; they are redefining life with a changing environment.

A New Rural Revolution: Beyond Conventional Limits

Emma Aldous, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

Suffolk's farming landscape carries centuries of change – from Neolithic farmers clearing the wildwood to today's intensive arable fields. Unimproved grasslands have vanished, field ponds have disappeared, and soil health has declined. But facing converging climate and biodiversity crises, a growing number of Suffolk farmers are trying something different.

As our food supplies have grown, our environment has paid the price. Unimproved grasslands vanished, field ponds disappeared, and soil health declined. Facing climate and biodiversity crises, a new approach is taking root. Regenerative Agriculture offers hope for a healthier, more resilient future.

It is not founded on a prescriptive checklist, but is a mindset shift. Treating farms as a living, interconnected systems in which soils, plants, animals, water, air, and people all play vital roles. It aims to improve soils, increase biodiversity and strengthen natural cycles.

Restoring Natural Capital: The Soil-First Approach

At the heart of the regenerative change in Suffolk is a focus on soil health. Unlike conventional methods, regenerative approaches aim to restore natural cycles, such as those of carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus, which are essential nutrients for plants but can be disrupted by traditional farming. Results from local pilot farms, such as Dennington Hall Farm in mid-Suffolk, show that adopting these practices can increase soil organic matter by up to 0.5 percentage points per year, with some fields reaching a 2 per cent gain over four years. Similarly, carbon sequestration rates at these pilot sites have been measured at up to 3 metric tons per hectare per year. These measurable improvements demonstrate the real impact that a soil-first approach can have on land health and climate resilience.

Minimising Soil Disturbance: The principle of no-till or reduced-tillage farming is key. By reducing soil disturbance, farmers limit carbon loss, protect soil microbial communities, and prevent rapid oxidation of organic matter. This practice directly enhances the soil's ability to act as a carbon sink, drawing down atmospheric carbon dioxide, a key climate change mitigation benefit.

Living Roots and Ground Cover: Regenerative farmers in Suffolk are increasingly utilising cover crops and catch crops. These are non-cash crops grown specifically to keep living roots in the soil year-round. These roots feed soil biology and improve soil structure, which is crucial for resilience. One grower, speaking about their experience, said: "It was the only field we could drill that week," after summer catch crops helped maintain soil stability following heavy rain because the living roots had successfully kept the soil in good condition. This improved infiltration and stability directly reduces surface water run-off and erosion, supporting broader flood mitigation efforts.

The Return of Livestock and Biodiversity

Bringing livestock back into arable (crop-growing) systems is a defining aspect of regenerative farming in Suffolk. This practice copies how animals would naturally move and graze, as wild herds do.

Mimicking Nature with Managed Grazing: Mob grazing is the moving of sheep or cattle, quickly through fields, with intense grazing for short periods, followed by a lengthy rest to support land recovery. It mimics natural animal movement and helps soils recover and capture more carbon. After 30 days of rest, clover and wildflowers often bloom where bare soil once cracked and compacted and earthworm casts appear among the new growth. Animal manure acts as a natural fertiliser, reducing the need for artificial fertilisers.

Ecological Benefits: Returning livestock and cutting synthetic pesticides expand biodiversity. Farmers observe more birdlife and restored balance. Once-rare species, such as lapwing, now nest in wetter, richer fields. Red-listed pollinators like the shrill carder bee signal that management changes permit fragile insects to reclaim lost habitat. Weeds enhance soil and provide refuge for insects and pollinators.

At Dennington Hall Farm, they are creating earthy, seedy plots and enlarging the dense scrubland turtle doves need for nesting. By lowering soil fertility levels, using shingle from nearby gravel pits to suppress dominant grasses, and encouraging arable "weeds" such as fumitory and chickweed on the margins they are improving the landscape to benefit turtle doves while also farming productively.

Case Studies: Orchards, Marshes, and Woodland

Projects supported by the Farming in Protected Landscapes grant, part of the Dedham Vale and the Coast & Heaths National Landscape, show practical regenerative principles. These grants are not just one-off opportunities – they can be models for other farms. Any Suffolk farm aiming to improve biodiversity, soil, or water can apply.

Orchard Regeneration (Dodnash Fruit Farm): Many traditional orchards become unproductive due to overcrowding and a lack of pruning. Dodnash Fruit Farm began a regeneration project to thin and prune old orchards and improve the soil. Mulching with tree clippings helped retain water and keep soil healthy. Their aim is to make the farm's orchards viable and preserve them. Beyond ecological benefits, the effort helps revive Suffolk's fruit heritage: the crisp sweetness of a russet apple or the perfumed tang of a forgotten pear, once again ripe for tasting. Success comes by restoring a heritage landscape, enabling fruit harvest, and attracting pollinators, hedgehogs, badgers, and birds of prey.

Wetland Enhancement (Iken Hall Farms): In Suffolk's low-lying estuarine areas, integrating water management with farming is crucial. Iken Hall Farm received funding to improve marshes for breeding waders and wintering wildfowl. A solar-powered pump and new pipework channel water through ditches, creating wet grassland and mud to supply wader chicks with abundant food. In the first year, average nitrate runoff from these wetlands dropped by 36 per cent, and downstream water clarity improved, leading to the return of water voles along the ditches. This exemplifies land management that strengthens Natural Capital to deliver ecological and hydrological gains.

Ancient Woodland Restoration (Rivers Hall Farm Estate): Rivers Hall is a set within a diverse, undulating landscape with numerous small, steep-sided valleys running from the main Stour River valley. There are several ancient woodlands scattered through the estate, the most notable of which is Ash Wood.

Many years ago rhododendron and bamboo had been introduced as game cover, but became invasive and dominated the ancient woodland understorey, causing severe damage to the native ground flora, smothering and suppressing natural tree regeneration within Ash wood. They created an impenetrable barrier, preventing natural recovery.

Ancient woodland is one of the richest and most diverse habitats we have and encompasses the whole spectrum from soils, fungi, plants, and animals. However, many ancient woodlands lose biodiversity due to lack of management or outright neglect. The project's goal was to restore ancient woodland and protect native trees and plants now at risk. This involved removing the invasive species and preventing their return in the first year. In the second year, 1,000 new native trees and shrubs were planted.

Challenges and the Future Landscape

Despite clear benefits, several barriers slow the wider adoption of regenerative agriculture.

Economic and Consumer Pressure: Processed and inexpensive foods are common, changing these habits is a significant challenge. For regenerative farming to go mainstream, consumers need to adjust their choices to support it in the long term. Many people neither see local farms nor feel connected to their food sources.

However, even small changes make a difference. You can support regenerative agriculture by buying from local farmers' markets, subscribing to local veg box schemes from regenerative farms, or choosing products with certifications such as Organic, Pasture for Life, or LEAF Marque. Asking local shops about the origins of produce and seeking out farm visits or open days also helps strengthen these connections.

All of us have a role to play in shaping Suffolk's future. Whether you choose to taste locally grown produce, visit a regenerative farm, or invest your support in new practices, your participation matters. Will you join this shared journey to create a more resilient, abundant, and thriving landscape for generations to come?

Regenerative change in Suffolk is growing stronger. The importance of natural capital is better understood and policymakers are focusing on solutions for water, biodiversity, and carbon storage. Suffolk's farmers are learning from the past, and receiving training and support in their endeavour to build a more resilient, diverse, and productive landscape.

The Vanishing Night

Emma Aldous, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

The deep darkness of Suffolk's night is vanishing, replaced by a relentless, amber glow. For those who care about the county's biodiversity, this growing skyglow is more than a loss of beauty; it is an immediate and urgent threat to biodiversity

The 2025 *Ecology Review: Impact of Artificial Light at Night* (ALAN) *on Wildlife and Ecosystems* by Bill McGeeney of **Light Pollution News** highlights this problem. The 'light curtain' spread across the landscape is changing the natural rhythms of life, from the soil under our feet to the birds flying high above the North Sea.

The review unites the latest research from around the world and the UK, revealing an alarming trend. Light pollution is now emerging as a pervasive and escalating threat at every level of the ecosystem. It alters communities in ways we scarcely understand, demanding swift and decisive action. We must include dark infrastructure in our conservation plans now. Adding light-reduction measures to Suffolk's Local Nature Recovery Strategies and protecting dark corridors in National Landscapes and County Wildlife Sites must become top priorities. These actions will equip policymakers to tackle light pollution head-on, ensuring dark infrastructure features are immediately included in our biodiversity response.

Shadowed Foundations of Soil and Subterranean Life

When we think about light pollution, we usually look up at the sky. But the 2025 Review shows that its effects go deep into the soil. Earthworms, which are vital for Suffolk's farmland and woods, are showing major changes in their behaviour.

Experiments show that earthworms are up to 76 per cent less active on the surface when exposed to artificial light. This is not just because they avoid light. Nine years of field studies in the review reveal that blue light, like that from modern LED streetlights, greatly lowers both the number and weight of earthworm populations.

Young earthworms also change how they group together in response to light. Instead of spreading out to keep soil healthy, they form larger, tighter clumps. The risk is clear: light pollution is already altering soil structure, disrupting nutrient movement, and threatening the amount of carbon the land can store. For Suffolk, this kind of soil damage presents an urgent and growing crisis. [**Read article**].

Aerial Decline and the Trillion-Insect Problem

Most people know that insect numbers are falling. The review adds a new detail to this problem: by using weather radar over 35,000 square kilometres of the UK, researchers measured just how many insects are in the air. During peak times, there are about 11.2 trillion insects in the sky during the day, but only 5 trillion at night.

The data reveal that night-active insects, especially moths, are declining at a frightening rate. In places with heavy light pollution, insect activity plummets. The problem is acute in the north of the UK – but it is spreading fast. Suffolk, home to many rare moths, faces a clear warning. The review exposes two urgent reasons for their decline. First, the 'vacuum cleaner effect' draws insects away from natural habitats with artificial lights. [**Read article**].

Second, that light pollution gravely disrupts natural feeding signals. In controlled trials, almost 80 per cent of grass spiders (*Agelenopsis*

Grass spider © Matthew Lindsey, Flickr

pennsylvanica) built their webs near lights, even without food, while prey-rich dark areas were ignored. This deadly trap lures them to light over survival, resulting in poor hunting outcomes and more predators. [Read article].

Light pollution even disrupts the songs of male crickets; those exposed to light sing at unnatural times and with altered sounds, putting breeding at risk and threatening the sounds of Suffolk's summer nights. [Read article].

Phenological Mismatch in Trees

Artificial light pollution also affects plants, causing seasonal events such as flowering and leaf fall to become out of sync with nature. Deciduous woodlands use day length to know when to change seasons, but streetlights and skyglow delay autumn leaf drop and make spring buds appear earlier. This shift can be harmful. If a tree starts growing too soon, it may leaf and flower before pollinators or caterpillars are ready. If it keeps its leaves too late, it risks damage from early frosts and disrupts how nutrients return to the soil. [Read article].

The review warns that invasive plants can gain a major advantage in artificial light. These species often grow faster than native plants, and by lighting up rural edges, we risk accelerating their spread. This could rapidly outcompete the local plants that are essential to Suffolk's biodiversity. [Read article].

Disorientation on the Wing along the Coastline

Suffolk's coast is a vital and vulnerable route for migrating birds. The review's evidence is urgent: artificial light is now turning these paths hazardous, confusing and endangering birds. Researchers recording birds' night calls show real-time, dangerous changes in their behaviour. Birds under light change how they call and fly, using more energy and increasing their risk of deadly collisions. [Read article].

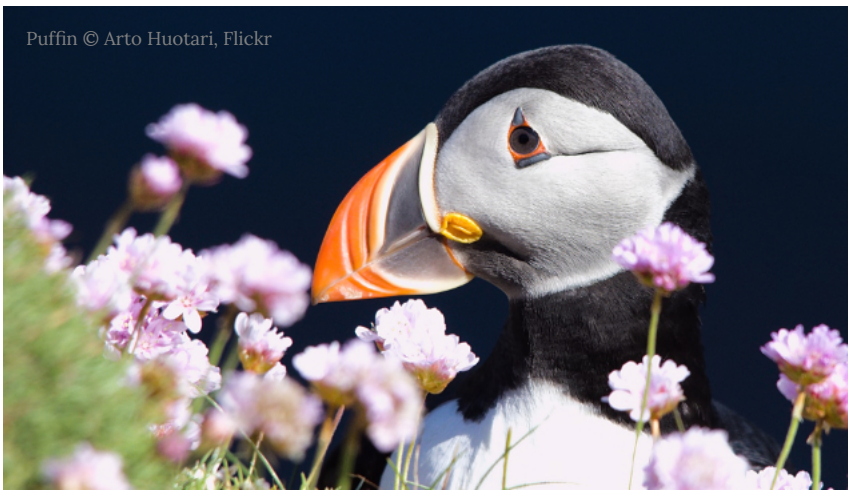
For seabirds, the stakes are even higher. In coastal regions, young puffins and petrels are stranded in increasing numbers, fatally drawn to lights on land. Tests with young puffins show a powerful attraction to any light, regardless of bulb type. This finding demands urgent action: simply changing light type is not enough – turn off lights completely during the key fledging season or risk escalating loss. [Read article].

The Aquatic Veil from Salmon to Algal Blooms

Artificial light invades more than our land; in estuaries and rivers, it actively destabilises aquatic life. A major study on coral reefs found that prolonged night-time illumination drove predatory fish – including daytime species – to unnatural levels of activity, disrupting the sleep and recovery needed by entire reef communities. These disruptions pose a mounting threat. [Read full article].

In the UK, this is an urgent crisis for migratory fish like salmon. Young salmon face mounting threats as they move to the sea, and artificial riverbank lights make them easy targets for predators, disrupting critical survival journeys. [Read article].

Evidence is growing that light pollution is fuelling harmful algal blooms. Night-lit waterways let some algae photosynthesise around the clock –helping these harmful species take over. Our waterways are now at real and rising risk, threatening the food web supporting invertebrates and fish. [Read article].



Puffin © Arto Huotari, Flickr

Policy and Mitigation Strategies for the Dark

One positive note from the 2025 review is that light pollution, unlike chemicals or plastic, can be reversed immediately; turning off a light has an instant effect. However, voluntary programs are no longer sufficient to address the problem at scale. The review highlights the need for mandatory regulations and specific policies to protect the night environment. For example, legal requirements for safer lighting helped reduce seabird deaths in Hawaii, discussed **here**. In the UK, policymakers should treat darkness as a habitat requiring formal protection, incorporating explicit policies and planning rules to reduce and manage artificial light.

To protect Suffolk's biodiversity, a clear step-by-step policy approach is needed. Policymakers could begin by piloting targeted measures to reduce light pollution in selected County Wildlife Sites or National Landscapes. These trials should include defined objectives, baseline monitoring, and measurable criteria for success. Evaluating these pilots will help identify the most effective actions. Once proven, the strategies can be expanded countywide through a structured implementation plan – prioritising mapping and protecting dark corridors, updating lighting standards in critical areas, and regulating timing and intensity of lights on both public and private land. Explicit milestones and regular reviews should ensure accountability and allow for adaptive management. Progress should be tracked through indicators such as night insect counts, earthworm surveys, and bird monitoring along the coast, with findings shared through Suffolk's Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

Key technical measures for reducing harm include spectral optimisation – using warmer, amber lights below 2700K rather than blue or bright white LEDs; directional shielding to ensure all outdoor lights point downward and away from hedges, water, and the sky; temporal management through 'part-night lighting plans that turn off non-essential lights during periods of peak wildlife activity; and the identification and protection of dark corridors – stretches of woodland, river, and coastline that remain free from light pollution and allow wildlife to move and migrate safely.

What You Can Do

Joining Buglife's **Don't Neglect the Night** campaign is a practical first step. At home, adding motion sensors to outdoor lights, directing fittings downward, and closing curtains at dusk all make a meaningful contribution to reducing light spillage. Speaking to your local council about 'bug-friendly lighting and supporting national targets to reduce light pollution can extend that impact further.

Nature keeps working after the sun goes down. Small, consistent actions – at home, in the community, and in policy – can help Suffolk remain a place where the stars shine, the soil stays healthy, and wildlife thrives in the dark.

© Photographic discoveries with Ray

Suffolk's Unsung Pollinators: the Quiet World of Solitary Bees

Emma Aldous,
Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

Tawny Mining Bee *Andrena fulva*
© Christopher Quintin

The mining bee, mason bee and leafcutter may lack the honeybee's fame – but they are every bit as vital to the Suffolk landscape.

Next time you walk the sandy heathlands or a wildflower meadow on the Suffolk coast, look down. Among the bare patches of earth, something remarkable may be happening. A small, fuzzy bee – working entirely alone, without a hive, a queen, or a single colony-mate – is going about the most important job in the landscape. She is pollinating it.

Solitary bees account for the vast majority of the 270 or so bee species found in the United Kingdom, and in many habitats, they are considerably more effective pollinators than their more celebrated social cousins. Each female is her own queen, worker, and architect. She excavates a nest, provisions it with a ball of pollen and nectar, lays a single egg, seals the chamber, and moves on – never to meet her offspring. Mining bees burrow into bare sandy soil; mason bees favour hollow stems and crevices in stone; leafcutter bees line their tunnels with precisely cut circles of leaf. All are industrious, all are fascinating, and all are under pressure.

> *"Bare soil is not a wasteland. It is a bee nursery."*

Why They Are Struggling

The loss of wildflower-rich habitats has been well documented, and solitary bees have suffered alongside every other pollinator group. But the specific resource they depend on most – bare, sparsely vegetated, warm soil – is also the thing we are most inclined to tidy away. A south-facing sandy bank or a loose-earthed path margin is not a problem to be fixed with grass seed or wood chips. It is a prime nesting habitat. When we cover it over, we remove something irreplaceable.

This is precisely why the volunteer work to expose the old sand bunkers at the Old Waldringfield rewilding site matters so much. Clearing the vegetation to reveal the sandy soil beneath is not tidying up – it is opening a nursery. The heathland restoration at Pipers Vale in Ipswich serves the same purpose, creating the warm, open conditions that ground-nesting species depend upon.

What You Can Do

You can help solitary bees without owning a large plot of land: Leave a sunny patch of bare, undisturbed soil. Allow dandelions and clover to bloom before your first mowing. Plant marjoram – a purple-flowered magnet that draws dozens of bee species on warm afternoons and helps make Cornard Country Park's wildflower meadows valuable. Keep hollow plant stems standing over winter rather than cutting them back in autumn. Take these simple steps today to make a real difference.

None of this requires expertise – only the willingness to act and relinquish a little tidiness. Join the volunteers giving their time to expose sandy soil at Waldringfield, plant hedgerows at Holbrook, or scythe meadows at Cornard. Your actions make space for something that cannot speak for itself. Next time you see a small, solitary bee making her way across a patch of bare earth, remember: you have the power to help her thrive.

Pet Flea Treatments Are Polluting UK Rivers

Buglife

A new report warns that common pet flea and tick treatments are contaminating UK rivers with harmful pesticides, threatening freshwater wildlife.

A **new report** from wildlife charity Buglife, published on National Love Your Pet Day (20th February), reveals that pesticides from common flea and tick treatments are now widespread in rivers across Britain. These veterinary medicines, used by many pet owners, may be contributing to major declines in freshwater invertebrates such as dragonflies, mayflies, shrimps and damselflies, particularly near wastewater treatment works and urban waterways where contamination is highest.

Love your pet

The UK is a nation of pet owners, and veterinary medicines are essential for animal health; they can also help to safeguard humans. Many owners are unaware that treatments contain pesticides, including fipronil and the neonicotinoid imidacloprid, infamously linked to colony collapse disorder in bees. Although both were banned for outdoor agricultural use in the UK in 2018, they remain widely used in pet products, with monthly and preventative treatments increasing overall use. These chemicals are not removed by wastewater treatment plants or septic systems, allowing them to enter rivers.

How big is the problem?

Buglife's desk-based review found that both pesticides pose significant risks to aquatic invertebrates, disrupting food webs and ecosystem functions, with knock-on effects for fish and birds. In 2022, fipronil was the highest-ranked organic contaminant in English ground and surface waters, and in 2023, imidacloprid posed the greatest risk across the Greater London catchment.

Pesticides can reach waterways through dogs swimming, moulted fur, and washing pets or their bedding. One survey found 100% of wash-off samples from treated dogs contained both chemicals.

What can be done?

To protect freshwater life, Buglife is urging the Government to act fast. Recommendations include:

- Require that all veterinary products containing fipronil and imidacloprid be available only by prescription to reduce unnecessary use and control access.
- Update and strengthen guidance for veterinarians and pet owners on the environmental risks posed by these products, so that use is more informed and cautious.
- Ban the online sale of veterinary products containing harmful pesticides to limit unregulated, easy access and help control distribution.
- Ensure rapid adoption of risk-based flea and tick treatments, so products are used only when necessary, thereby minimising overall pesticide input into waterways.
- Revise veterinary product packages to prioritise safer alternatives and encourage the use of non-chemical or lower-risk solutions where appropriate, reducing potential water contamination.

This report arrives amid a growing awareness of the issues surrounding our ecosystems, as reflected by the efforts of various groups and organisations.

Recent studies, reports, and news coverage focusing on rivers, songbirds, and fish highlight shared concerns and underscore the urgent need for coordinated action.

"Freshwater biodiversity is in crisis, and flea treatments are a key concern. These products are routinely applied to pets, leading to chemical residues entering homes and rivers at levels that are devastating to invertebrates. This must stop now. We need urgent, decisive action to keep the most harmful substances out of our waterways before the damage becomes irreversible."

Craig Macadam, Buglife.

Guardians of the Deep

The Orford Inshore Marine Conservation Zone

Lightbulb Sea Squirt (Clavelina lepadiformis) © Natural England/Adele Morgan

Emma Aldous, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

The Suffolk coastline is famous for its terrestrial landscapes, but the conservation story extends offshore. Lying 14 kilometres from the Alde-Ore estuary is the Orford Inshore Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), a 72 km2 area dedicated to safeguarding nationally important marine wildlife and habitats. An MCZ is a specific type of Marine Protected Area (MPA) established under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, forming a vital component of the UK's network to protect North Sea biodiversity.

Subtidal Mixed Sediments

Designated in 2019, the MCZ's protection is centred on the subtidal mixed sediments habitat. This mosaic of sand, gravel, mud, and shell creates a highly heterogeneous environment that generates countless ecological niches, providing refuge and serving as a foundation for the area's rich biodiversity.

A Critical Nursery and Food Anchor

The ecological significance of this MCZ is twofold. Firstly, its unique stability and texture provide a perfect substrate for the eggs of key commercial species like the Dover sole and lemon sole, making it a vital Fish Nursery. Protecting this spawning ground is vital to regional fish stock replenishment.

Surveys have also revealed a wide array of species, including polychaete worms, bivalve molluscs, amphipods, and echinoderms. These organisms, which include commonly sighted species like the hermit crab and the common whelk, play an important role in nutrient cycling and bioturbation (reworking sediments), enhancing the overall habitat health.

Secondly, the zone acts as a Food Web Linchpin because it is a foraging area for sandeels. These small, energy-rich fish are a primary food source for larger predators, including breeding seabirds and marine mammals like the harbour porpoise, which is frequently observed in the area.

Scientific Monitoring

Effective conservation is built on a robust evidence base. Post-designation monitoring uses a dual methodology to assess its condition. Remote sensing via drop-frame camera systems captures high-resolution imagery for assessment of the seabed and surface-dwelling animals. And physical sampling, using a mini Hamon grab, collects sediment for detailed laboratory analysis, including Particle Size Analysis and identification of burrowing organisms. This quantitative data is essential for tracking ecosystem health over time.

The Threats and Management Challenge

Despite its protected status, the MCZ exists within a heavily used environment and is subject to significant human pressures. The largest threat comes from Commercial Fishing, specifically bottom-towed fishing. This causes physical disturbance that degrades the complex sediment structure. Although extraction of sand and gravel does not occur within the MCZ, the proximity of extraction areas poses risks from noise and sediment plumes. The rapid development of wind farms, means that environmental impact assessments for construction and cable laying must rigorously assess the potential impacts on the protected habitats. Effective guardianship requires constantly balancing these competing demands for marine space.

A Sustained Commitment

The Orford Inshore MCZ is a crucial commitment to UK marine conservation. Its long-term success is not guaranteed by designation alone; it requires a sustained, adaptive management regime supported by continuous, high-calibre scientific monitoring. This guardianship is a demanding, ongoing endeavour, requiring a delicate balance between economic interests and the profound ecological value of the North Sea's deep waters.

The Beaver Returns

A Wild Visitor to the Little Ouse

Emma Aldous,
Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

On the night of 2nd November 2025, a trail camera positioned along the bank of the Little Ouse near Thelnetham recorded something extraordinary – a large, unmistakeable shape moving through the water. It was a European Beaver. The first wild beaver seen in Suffolk for approximately 400 years.

Beaver © dennisbehm, Flickr

Reg Langston, one of the founding members of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project (LOHP), had placed cameras along the river to monitor otters. What he found instead stopped him in his tracks. "I check a thousand or so images each month and most are of branches waving in the wind, but occasionally I see an otter or a kingfisher perching in front of the camera," he said. "A beaver was the last thing I expected to see."

Yet there it was – and it showed no sign of moving on. The first **recording of the Beaver** showed it chasing away the regular adult male Otter. Over the following weeks, the animal continued to appear on camera, leaving feeding signs along the river. It began in a restricted area beneath a willow tree, which it had been eating, before gradually extending its range along the waterway. Five cameras are now monitoring the site as experts work to establish where the animal originated.

A Neighbour on the Black Bourn

The most likely candidate lies less than nine miles away as the crow flies. In February 2024, Little Haugh Hall near Norton, Bury St Edmunds – a historic estate sitting on The Black Bourn – became the first site in Suffolk to receive a licensed beaver reintroduction. A family group of two adults and three young kits arrived at the estate, and quickly set to work felling trees and constructing dams. Suffolk Wildlife Trust anticipated that their efforts would catalyse a surge in biodiversity across the area, and estate owner Tatjana Greil-Castro hoped that the dams would contribute to improved water quality on the property. The estate views the beavers as central to its ambition to create a healthy and biodiverse landscape.

The Black Bourn flows from Norton through the Black Bourn Valley – itself a rewilding project managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust, where riverside meadows are lightly grazed, new wetland habitats have been created, and the river once again spills across the meadows in winter, attracting teal, gadwall, and snipe. The river eventually joins the Little Ouse west of Knettishall, downstream of Thelnetham, a waterway journey of some 19 miles. Whether the animal recorded at Thelnetham made that journey, or came from another source entirely, remains unconfirmed. What is certain is that the landscape connecting these two river systems is rich in the habitat a beaver needs.

Twenty Years in the Making

The appearance of a wild beaver on the Little Ouse is not merely a happy accident. The Little Ouse Headwaters Project was established in 2002 by local residents to promote conservation and enjoyment of the fenland habitats bordering the upper reaches of the river, which lies on the Norfolk–Suffolk border between Blo' Norton in Norfolk and Thelnetham in Suffolk. Over more than two decades, the charity has steadily restored the valley's wetland habitats, reversing the damage caused by post-war over-deepening of the river channel, which had drained the surrounding fen and driven a sharp decline in

biodiversity. Ellie Beach, LOHP's conservation manager, was clear about what the sighting represents: "The return of such an iconic species to the Norfolk and Suffolk border is a fantastic example of how restoring the valley can aid the local wildlife."

Nature's Engineer

For those unfamiliar with the beaver's ecological importance, its return deserves more than a moment's celebration. As a keystone species and one of nature's most formidable ecological engineers, beavers create and maintain habitats through the building of dams and the creation of dead wood – environments where an abundance and diversity of life can flourish. Their dams slow the flow of water, trap carbon and nutrients, and improve water quality downstream. In a county where flooding is an increasing concern and river health is under pressure, the beaver is not merely a charismatic visitor – it is a potential ally.

Only 14% of rivers in the UK are currently in good ecological condition. Beaver activity has been shown to raise water tables, diversify riparian habitats, and support species ranging from dragonflies and brown trout to bats and breeding waders.

A Wider Picture

The government has now announced that applications to return beavers into river catchments in England will be accepted, paving the way for this native species to roam wild in British rivers and lakes once more. Licensed wild releases are already under way at sites across the country. With the Black Bourn population established, the Little Ouse corridor restored, and now a confirmed wild sighting linking the two, Suffolk finds itself at a genuinely exciting moment in its rewilding story.

Whether the Little Ouse beaver settles permanently, moves on, or is eventually joined by others, its arrival sends a clear signal. The patient, painstaking work of restoration – removing non-native tree plantations, managing fens and decades of volunteer effort – is beginning to produce results that no one could have scripted. The beaver found Suffolk because Suffolk, quietly and determinedly, had made itself ready.

If you see signs of beaver activity – felled or gnawed wood, characteristic cone-shaped stumps, or spoil from bankside burrows – please report your sighting through the **SBIS website** or the iRecord app. As beavers are a protected species, these records are essential for monitoring their recovery and ensuring their habitats remain undisturbed.


© Rowena Langston, Little Ouse Headwater Project

Hidden in Plain Sight: The Citizen Scientists Mapping Britain's Rarities

Emma Aldous, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

The beaver on the Little Ouse was found by a trail camera set up to look for otters. It is a reminder that surprising discoveries rarely announce themselves – they turn up in the corner of the frame, under a log, or on the margin of a path walked a hundred times before. You do not need to be an expert to find something remarkable. You simply need to be paying attention.

Professional ecologists cannot be everywhere at once. Suffolk's diverse landscapes demand extensive data for effective management, and it is the records submitted by members of the public – from garden moths to heathland lichens – that fill the gaps. Every sighting you share, no matter how small or ordinary it may seem, plays a vital part in deepening our understanding of the county's natural heritage.

Nomada guttulata

Recent surveys have turned up some interesting finds, including the nomad bee (*Nomada guttulata*), which is very rare in Suffolk as most UK sightings occur in the southeast of England. The new discovery suggests it is extending its range northwards. As a cleptoparasite, or 'cuckoo' bee, it survives by laying its eggs in the nests of the mining bee *Andrena labiata*. Since its host is fairly common across Suffolk, there is every chance the bee will continue to spread – and your records will be the evidence that tracks it. (*Suffolk Natural History*, 2025, vol. 61)

Bog Snout Moth

Suffolk received an unexpected visitor in July 2024 when a Bog Snout (*Sparganothis pilleriana*) was

Nomada guttulata © Jens Bokelaar, iNaturalist

Sparganothis pilleriana © Lola Smirnova, iNaturalist

Pemphredon austriaca © Jeremy Early

Cladonia coccifera © Annelie Burghause, Flickr

discovered at Landguard. Typically found in fens, bogs, wet heaths, and saltmarshes, they have never been seen in Norfolk or Cambridgeshire, and only four times in Essex – with no records from saltmarshes. Its sudden appearance at Landguard remains an intriguing mystery for naturalists.
(*Suffolk Natural History*, 2025, vol. 61)

Pemphredon austriaca

Following records in Kent, the solitary wasp *Pemphredon austriaca* has now been confirmed in Suffolk. In early 2023, naturalists collected Oak Marble galls from Capel St Mary and across Ipswich, and successfully reared dozens of adults that would otherwise have remained hidden. These wasps typically nest in decaying wood and are notoriously difficult to spot in the wild. The discovery suggests the species is becoming increasingly widespread across the southeast. It demonstrates that even the most overlooked habitats can reveal significant trends in our regional biodiversity. [**Read more**]

Lichen Discoveries

The 2025 rediscovery of *Cladonia coccifera s. str.* During a Suffolk Naturalists' Society field meeing to Westleton Common, last recorded in 1989, underscores the site's potentially national importance for lichens. In 2026, Northfield Wood produced two new records: *Phaeographis smithii*, marking its first appearance in West Suffolk, and the rare *Sporodophoron cretaceum*, which belongs to a specialised group of lichens that inhabit ancient, dry-barked trees – habitats for which Britain holds international conservation responsibility.

How Your Records Matter

Every record submitted to the SBIS database is used to inform legal and environmental decisions. SBIS currently manages over six million records, which serve as the primary evidence base for the county. Under the Environment Act, developers must demonstrate a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain, and publicly sourced records provide the baseline needed to measure this. The Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy is also using these records to identify where habitats can be linked, helping species move across the county in response to environmental change.

You do not need specialist knowledge to contribute. If you are unsure of an identification, the SBIS website holds a useful **list of species guides**, and **county recorders** are always happy to help. Submit your sightings through the **SBIS website** or the iRecord app – noting the species, location, date, and any additional details or photographs.

The beaver was there all along, waiting to be seen. So is everything else.

A successfully overwintered Peacock nectaring on Cherry Plum blossom, 2025. ©James Corton

Second Brood Peacock

James Corton, Suffolk Branch of Butterfly Conservation

All my textbooks, including the very recent ones, state that the Peacock (Aglais io) is a single brooded species across its range but over the five years that I have been your county recorder for butterflies I have noticed in each year some late season larval counts being reported, and increasingly so.

It seems this is no longer a case of a few butterflies mistaking the season for springtime. We may be witnessing a climate change effect where the Peacock moves towards at least a partial second brood annually. I am not aware of any detailed scientific studies regarding the phenomenon so I can only state this as the field experience-based opinion of butterfly recorders such as myself and my European counterparts, particularly in Flanders and Holland. Previous studies on the Peacock have shown high mortality rates in late summer as they enter early hibernation (mainly from active predators such as bats, mice, birds and spiders while they themselves aestivate before proper hibernation). The quality of nettles, their larval foodplant, is also variable due to drier and warmer summers. Peacock, like Small Tortoiseshell, requires high nitrogen content leaves and larval mortality increases when drought occurs. As such, the benefit of a second brood is still unknown, particularly with the increased summer activity of parasitic flies such as the tachinid Sturmia bella which arrived in 1998 and expanded rapidly. I was fortunate enough to witness a lengthy courtship between a pair of Peacocks at SWT Carlton Marshes this year, the male closely following the female in level flight about 1.5m above the ground. Each time she perched, she closed her wings while he landed nearby and performed his characteristic courtship. His open wings were fluttered a few millimetres up and down but rapidly in order to waft pheromones across her antennae, where her scent detectors are located. This behaviour proceeded for over a quarter of an hour with regular flights and gliding preceding pheromone wafting, before I lost sight of them. So, while I can't say whether this particular courtship produced a second generation, a few reports of larval webs have come in from observers elsewhere. Only time will tell whether the Peacock moves decisively towards a second generation or not and whether this has an adverse effect on our population of this majestic species. In the meantime, I thank you for your records and ask that you continue to record unusual or out of season behaviour for any species.

Newly emerged Peacock courtship at SWT Carlton Marshes, 2025 ©James Corton

The churchyard at St. Mary's Church, Chiddingfold. Credit: Jess

Researching God's Acre: The Biodiversity of British Churchyards

Jess Botha, Leverhulme Centre for Anthropocene Biodiversity

One of the most widespread community initiatives seeking to improve biodiversity in the UK is churchyard improvement schemes. Jess Botha considers why they are important and what we can learn from them.

> *"I like that ancient Saxon phrase, which calls*
> *The burial-ground God's-Acre! It is just;*
> *It consecrates each grave within its walls,*
> *And breathes a benison o'er the sleeping dust."*
>
> **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1842**

I often find myself in a churchyard when in need of a moment of quiet contemplation, reflection, or simply a break from the relentless pace of modern life. While the idea of walking amongst the resting places of so many who have died - and therefore staring one's own mortality in the face - might not seem like a relaxing thought, I find it soothing to surround myself with trees, birds, and flowers, and remind myself that life continues in all its infinite forms long after we return to the dust from which we are made.

This personal sense of solace is mirrored in the physical prominence of these spaces across the nation. Churches, and their associated churchyards, are a familiar sight across England and Wales; it is estimated that there are at least 20,000 churchyards in these two countries.1 These sacred spaces are valuable archives of hundreds of years of social history, places for commemoration and remembrance, and sanctuaries for wildlife and flora. Their prominence in the landscape and in the lives of those past sees them featured in poetry, play, and story. Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' is undoubtedly one of the most famous examples. The fourth verse features the yew tree, the tree most strongly associated with churchyards:

> *"Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,*
> *Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,*
> *Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,*
> *The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."*

Beyond the shade of the yew, Gray weaves other elements of the natural world into his landscape: the 'droning' beetle, the 'moping' owl, and the 'twitt'ring' swallow.

While Gray saw the churchyard as a place of quiet rest, modern perspectives have increasingly recognised these spaces as living landscapes with importance for biodiversity. They have remained relatively unchanged through the years, watching the country around them alter drastically, driven by industrialisation, urbanisation, and the intensification of agricultural practices. Due to the separation of consecrated land (which churchyards are) and unconsecrated land, the grassland habitat within churchyards mostly escaped the ploughing, fertilisers, and pesticides that impacted the surrounding landscape. As such, the ancient grassland ecology within churchyards can remain relatively unchanged from when the church was fenced hundreds of years ago. This type of grassland was widespread within the UK but has declined by 97%.[2]

Holy Trinity Churchyard, Oxford: the resting place of C. S. Lewis. Credit: Jess

With much of what remains being held within churchyard walls or fences, these spaces have become a microcosm of a vanished natural habitat which, in turn, provides a home for a number of species.

These sites offer a unique diversity of habitat. The stone walls, headstones, grave markers and chest tombs provide niches for species such as ferns, mosses, algae and lichens. The British Lichen Society states that of the approximately 2,000 British lichen species, over a third are found in churchyards. In fact, in some parts of the country, there are species of lichen which are found exclusively in churchyards.[3] Even the church buildings themselves can be vital; research published in 2025 as part of the Bats in Churches Project found that around half of the 753 churches surveyed housed bats. When the churches were medieval, this percentage rose to 78.4%,[4] highlighting the importance for conservation of these buildings for both historic interest and species protection.

Recognising this value, the charity Caring for God's Acre, established in 2000, works to promote the conservation and appreciation of churchyards and other burial grounds.[5] Eco Church, an initiative launched in 2016 by the Christian charity A Rocha UK, provides a framework for sustainable management through a survey filled in by participating churches.[6]

Having the opportunity to analyse this Eco Church data for the first time, I aim to provide insight into what these church groups are doing for nature, the methods they employ, and perhaps most importantly, the challenges they encounter. By combining these findings with ecological surveys and interviews, this research aims to create a clearer picture of what these sites contain, how they are managed for this biodiversity, and how these local efforts can be applied to nature recovery on a wider scale.

While there is evidence for the ecological importance of churchyards, the wider landscape faces increasing pressure. These 20,000 sites are time capsules of a vanished landscape and have potential to be important for nature recovery. By identifying which species live within their walls and how their habitats are best managed, this research aims to ensure that churchyards remain vibrant hubs of biodiversity. Additionally, it seeks to identify a management balance that fosters the life above the soil while maintaining a profound respect for the generations resting beneath it – preserving the sanctuary of 'God's Acre' for the future as much as for the past.

Information sign outside York Minster, a Gold Eco Church. Credit: Jess Botha

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Wrabness nature reserve © Max Martin

A £100,000 grant will help expand Wrabness Nature Reserve

Tom Fairbrother, Dedham Vale National Landscape

When Essex Wildlife Trust launched a fundraising appeal for Wrabness Nature Reserve, it took just five hours to hit the £30,000 target. That response, combined with a £100,000 Defra grant, has now secured six new acres of land beside the River Stour – bringing grazing marsh, ponds, and hedgerows under long-term conservation for the first time.

With support from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) capital investment fund, Essex Wildlife Trust has received £100,000 to invest in the future of Wrabness. This funding is part of a wider effort to bring more of our treasured landscapes under careful stewardship, ensuring they thrive for generations to come.

The grant was boosted by £56,346 raised by Essex Wildlife Trust through a fundraising appeal, which hit its original £30,000 target just five hours after it launched.

With these combined funds, the Trust can now secure six acres of land beside the existing reserve, nestled along the River Stour in North Essex. This new addition will be brought under long-term conservation, safeguarding its wild character for years to come.

Expanding the reserve means breathing new life into precious habitats: grazing marsh, ponds, and tangled hedgerows. These landscapes offer sanctuary to some of the UK's most threatened species, from the elusive nightingale to the gentle turtle dove.

This new land will weave Wrabness more tightly into the fabric of the surrounding landscape, strengthening the ecological network and building resilience for wildlife and wildflowers alike.

Wrabness is a quiet village set along the winding banks of the Stour, that draws walkers and naturalists to its riverside paths. Its links to artist Sir Grayson Perry and easy train journeys from Manningtree and Harwich add to its quiet charm.

Turtle Dove, Wrabness © Ant Niles

Nature recovery in the National Landscape

Tom Fairbrother,
Suffolk Coast and Heaths
National Landscape

In the UK, sadly the abundance and distribution of species on average continues to decline. This worrying scenario was highlighted in the State of Nature Report 2019. This report showed that of the 7,615 species found in England that have been assessed using the IUCN Regional Red List criteria, 971 (13%) are currently threatened with extinction from Great Britain.

The purpose of Nature Recovery is to engage partners to inspire and inform positive action. Through Nature Recovery work and projects we aim to conserve what remains, whilst also taking steps to reinstate what's been lost.

The Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape has a Nature Recovery Plan to help determine where the most important expanses of wildlife rich sites are, known as Nature Recovery Core Zones, with seven key areas identified.

To achieve these objectives, nature recovery work in the National Landscape involves working with landowners to identify suitable locations for enhancement, coordinating volunteer work parties to carry out the tasks such as tree planting, as well as sourcing external funding for large landscape scale projects such as wetland creation and river restoration.

Shotley Ringed Plover Project

For the past three years, temporary fencing has been installed on Shotley beach to protect nesting areas for important ground nesting birds on the river Orwell. The fencing helps to keep people and dogs away from the nests, but doesn't prevent access to the beach for recreational purposes.

Ringed plover and oystercatchers have now bred for three consecutive seasons due to the amazing efforts of volunteers that painstakingly erect and take down the fencing each season.

Old Waldringfield Rewilding Project

Nature has made great advances over the last few years at the former Old Waldringfield golf course site. The site has been left to rewild, and an abundance of new wildlife-rich habitats have developed astonishingly fast.

To complement the rewilding, volunteers have helped to manage the old sand bunkers by exposing the sandy soil beneath through vegetation clearance to enable rare species of wildflowers and solitary bees to benefit.

Heathland Restoration

Heathland is a vital priority habitat in the National Landscape. Our volunteers have helped to keep many fragmented heathland sites in tip top condition through regular conservation work.

By reducing scrub and bracken encroachment, heather and other species of heath-loving plants are able to thrive and create the conditions required by various species of reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. Pipers Vale in Ipswich, for example, has benefitted from volunteer efforts this year.

Hedge Planting

The planting of new hedges and the gapping up of existing ones is a high priority action identified with the National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan.

Hedgerows are vital corridors for wildlife that provide cover, nesting opportunities and food for an abundance of wildlife. They also enable the movement of animals between fragmented parcels of woodland.

Volunteers have helped us to plant numerous new hedgerows, including at a site in Lower Holbrook. The landowner benefited from National Landscape assistance by contacting us through the Call For Land scheme.

Download the full National Landscapes **Nature Recovery Plan**

Cornard Country Park Gains County Wildlife Site Status

Ross Bentley, Sudbury Common Lands Charity

One of my favourite wild places is Great Cornard Country Park – a wonderful spot on the southern tip of Great Cornard where the houses run out and the countryside takes over.

For the past 15 years, Sudbury Common Lands Charity rangers with the help of volunteers have been managing the park with nature in mind, on behalf of its owners Great Cornard Parish Council. Wildflower meadows have been raked and cleared to aid more delicate species; footpaths widened to create sunny glades for butterflies and reptiles; hedges have been repaired and patches of scrub left to spread, providing valuable habitat for birds and small mammals.

Now all this hard work has been recognised, as the park has recently been designated a County Wildlife Site (CWS).

County Wildlife Sites play a crucial role in conserving Suffolk's biodiversity and are often designated because they support characteristic or threatened species or habitats. According to the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service, there are more than 950 County Wildlife Sites in Suffolk, amounting to around 11,000 hectares and covering almost 3% of the county.

And while the County Wildlife Site designation is non-statutory, it does recognise the high value of a site for wildlife. Here at the Sudbury Common Lands Charity we see this award as a badge of honour.

Good stuff

According to Graham Hart, a conservation advisor at Suffolk Wildlife Trust, who led the assessment panel, there were a number of factors that helped Cornard Country Park gain County Wildlife Site status.

Much thanks must go to the Lavenham Natural History Group whose survey of the park revealed an incredible list of wildflowers including more than 100 bee orchids as well as six pyramidal orchids, their bright magenta spikes pushing up through the grasses.

Other floral finds include the pink and purples of field scabious and knapweed, the sunny yellows of yellow rattle and lady's bedstraw, and the delicate white of oxeye daisies. Marjoram, wild basil, and corn mint are also in abundance, bringing a sweet scent to the air in the summer.

Graham said: "This sheer diversity is a testament to the management that has allowed a rich and natural flora to flourish." The management plan was originally devised in 2009 by retired Commons Lands Charity senior ranger Adrian Walters and today is overseen by current rangers Alex and Aaron who run regular working parties of volunteers in the park.

And where there are wildflowers, there are insects. I've spent many

happy hours taking in the butterflies that inhabit the park during the warmer months. This summer I was particularly taken by the high number of common blues to be found flitting among the vegetation.

Several summers ago, it was grasshoppers that caught my attention in the Dane's Hole area of the park. It had been years since I'd seen so many. As I walked through the grass, they were jumping out of my way in their multitudes. A closer inspection of the world at ground level revealed scores of ants' nests and hundreds of tiny spiders – creatures most visitors to the park pass by, unaware of this other world a few feet from them.

A thank you must also go to the Cornard Wildlife & Environment Group and Great Cornard Parish Council for their work and commitment to improving the park for nature. Thank you also to volunteer recorder Debbie Ping who, among other things, has confirmed the presence of common lizard, grass snake and slow worm in the park, as well as barn owls and kestrels.

The park's close vicinity to Cornard Mere – a wetland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) only a few hundred yards away across a field – is another reason it was awarded CWS status, as it provides vital connecting habitat across the wider landscape. The panel also felt the park's mix of habitats very much counted in its favour; from fragments of ancient woodland and vibrant lowland meadows, to areas of scrub and dense, old hedgerows that act as corridors for wildlife.

When the panel of ecologists and conservationists made their visit to the park this May, they heard a cuckoo holding forth nearby before a nightingale announced itself, singing brightly from within an area of scrub. It was as if the wildlife was putting on a show for the VIPs.

The success in encouraging more wildlife to the park is especially pleasing, considering that the location is used by so many people of all generations. It shows that if we respect spaces, we can live in harmony with nature. It also means that our visits to the park can be more enjoyable and edifying.

Or as Graham put it: "County Wildlife Site status means a location has a high recreational and educational value - something that should not be underestimated."

Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Private Nature Reserve Network Passes 1,000 Hectares Milestone

Graham Hart, Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Suffolk Wildlife Trust's growing network of Private Nature Reserves is now protecting more than 1,000 hectares of land for wildlife across the county, marking a major milestone in efforts to reverse nature's decline.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the county's largest nature charity, is dedicated to protecting wildlife, restoring wild landscapes and inspiring people to take action for nature and climate. As part of its ambition to secure at least 30% of Suffolk's land and sea for nature, the Trust has rapidly expanded its work beyond its own nature reserves to support landowners and communities in managing land for wildlife.

This work has led to the creation of a thriving Private Nature Reserve (PNR) network, now made up of more than 200 privately owned sites covering over 1,000 hectares across Suffolk – a figure that continues to grow year on year. These landowners are making a significant contribution to the Trust's mission to Bring Nature Back.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust manages 2,900 hectares across 50 nature reserves in the county. The additional 1,000 hectares being protected and restored through the PNR network represents a major boost to efforts to improve biodiversity and restore wildlife-rich landscapes at scale.

Private Nature Reserves include a wide variety of habitats, such as grasslands, ponds, rivers, woodlands, scrub, wetlands and areas being left to regenerate naturally. The network does not include land that is farmed commercially, although commercial farms can still receive wildlife advice from the Trust's Farm Advice Team.

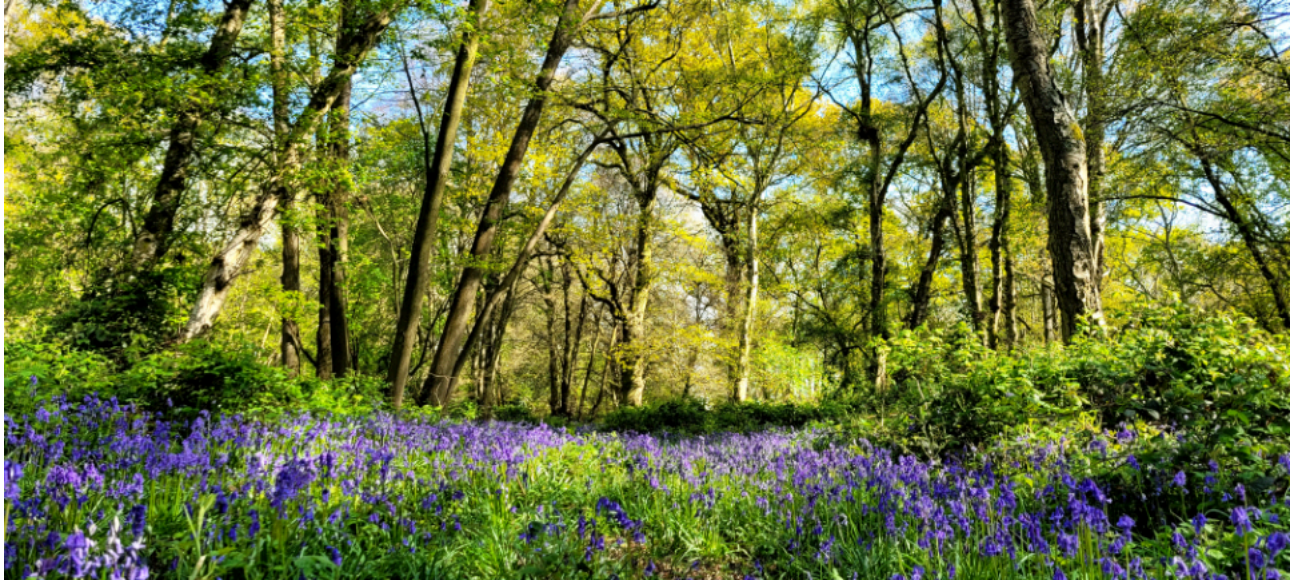
Importantly, registering land as a Private Nature Reserve does not grant public access, except where public rights of way already exist. Landowner privacy is respected, and site locations are not shared publicly.

The network is led by Graham Hart, Conservation Advisor at Suffolk Wildlife Trust, who has also established a successful PNR Owners Network. Regular meet-ups hosted by willing landowners allow members to connect, share experiences and support one another.

Graham said: "One of the most satisfying aspects of my work with Private Nature Reserve owners is seeing their passion for wildlife conservation and the collective contribution the network makes to improving biodiversity and connectivity throughout the county. It has created a shared sense of purpose and accomplishment. The network allows landowners to share their experiences, spread the word about conservation techniques and inspire others to take action for nature."

Membership of the Private Nature Reserve network is free. While landowners are encouraged to become members of Suffolk Wildlife Trust to support this work into the future, all PNR owners receive a range of advice and support, including:

- Free advisory visits with a written report
- Support with habitat creation and restoration
- Access to networking and meet-up events
- Advice on additional funding opportunities



PNR owners restoring or creating meadows can also join Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Green Hay Register, which supports the transfer of seed-rich hay from species-rich donor meadows to restoration sites, helping to establish diverse wildflower grasslands.

Graham is supported by a dedicated team of Volunteer Conservation Advisers, whose expertise has been crucial in reaching the 1,000-hectare milestone. One of these volunteers, Dorothy Casey, formerly Head of Conservation at the Trust, highlights the impact of this work.

Dorothy said: "I've had the pleasure of meeting many landowners who are committed to 'putting something back for Suffolk's wildlife'. Walking around a private nature reserve with its owner is always fascinating. We look at existing habitats, explore opportunities for restoration or creation, and discuss long-term management. Sometimes the best option is to do nothing at all – allowing land to regenerate naturally can deliver fantastic outcomes for wildlife."

She added that these privately managed wildlife sites act as vital "stepping stones" across the landscape, helping declining species such as song thrush, yellowhammer, skylark, turtle dove, great crested newt, butterflies, bats and reptiles to disperse and recolonise suitable habitats.

"It's incredibly rewarding to revisit private nature reserves and see how quickly wildlife can return. Land that supported very little wildlife only a few years ago can become rich and thriving. Seeing the enjoyment this brings to landowners is always inspiring," Dorothy said.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust is encouraging landowners who want to maximise their land's value for wildlife to join the Private Nature Reserve network and receive a free initial advisory visit. Members also gain access to exclusive events and a dedicated social media group, providing opportunities to share knowledge and build connections.

Working together, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and private landowners are helping to build resilience for nature across the county.

For more information about the Private Nature Reserve network, to arrange a visit, or to read landowner case studies, visit the **Private Nature Reserve page**

Ipswich Sees Green Growth as 1,250 New Trees Take Root

Ipswich Borough Council

Orwell Country Park is now home to 1,250 newly planted trees, part of the annual Ipswich Loves Trees Week celebrations in February.

Stretching across 60 hectares of woodland, meadow, and river valley on the southern edge of Ipswich, the park is already one of the town's most important green spaces for wildlife – and this latest planting will only strengthen that.

The Council's parks team chose a diverse mix of native species for Bridge Wood and Pond Hall Farm. Willow provides early-season pollen for emerging bees and supports over 260 species of invertebrate. Hawthorn offers dense nesting cover for birds and an autumn berry crop that sustains thrushes and redwings through the winter. Hazel supports dormice and produces the nuts that help them build their winter fat reserves. Buckthorn is the sole larval foodplant of the brimstone butterfly, one of the earliest butterflies on the wing each spring. Alder, well suited to the park's wetter ground, stabilises riverbanks and provides seed heads that sustain siskins and redpolls through the colder months.

As these trees mature, they will play an important role in capturing carbon, improving drainage, and providing habitat corridors that will connect to the park's existing woodland.

The planting is part of a wider effort that saw 4,757 trees established across Ipswich in the past year alone. Since 2010, the Council has operated a two-for-one policy – for every tree removed, two new ones are planted in its place.

Central to making it all happen are the Ipswich Tree Wardens – a network of local volunteers who work alongside the Council to plant, monitor, and care for the town's trees. Wardens receive training and support, and play a hands-on role in everything from new planting days to spotting trees in need of attention across the borough. If you'd like to get involved, visit the Ipswich Tree Wardens **website**.

The Suffolk Tree Guard Recycling Hub returns in May

Suffolk Tree Warden Network

*Bring your plastic tree guards and shrub shelters to the hub in Framsden to be recycled for free. To reserve your space and collect bags, please **reserve your space by email**.*

Please note:

- PVC spirals can't be accepted.
- Nest smaller guards into larger ones, and stack vertically into the sacks. Each sack can hold between 300-400 guards if nested and stacked correctly.
- Remove stakes and cable ties.

Protecting Tawny Owls, one chimney at a time

Amber Hanys, Suffolk Owl Sanctuary

The Tawny Owl is the UK's largest, most common, and most widespread breeding owl species. Found throughout England, Wales and Scotland (but not Ireland), this much-loved owl is strongly associated with woodlands, hence its alternative name, the "wood owl." However, Tawny Owls have adapted well to life alongside people and can thrive almost anywhere there are mature trees.

Nocturnal by nature, they spend their days roosting in secluded spots such as tree hollows and dense foliage. Perfectly adapted for hunting in darkness, they rely on silent flight, acute hearing, and excellent night vision to catch prey. In fact, they are far more likely to be heard than seen. Their iconic "twit-twoo" call is not one bird, but two; the female gives the sharp "twit," and the male responds with the drawn-out "twoo."

Small mammals, particularly rodents, make up the majority of their diet, although they will also take small birds, frogs, insects, worms, and occasionally fish. Tawny Owls breed from late winter into spring and are highly territorial during this period. With a UK conservation status of 'Amber', protecting this species remains important.

Chimneys: A Hidden Hazard

When roosting or nesting, Tawny Owls naturally seek out tree cavities. As large, mature trees decline, competition for these essential nesting spaces intensifies among birds and mammals. Unfortunately, open chimneys closely resemble these safe, hollow spaces. If a chimney is uncapped, an owl may enter, only to find itself trapped inside the narrow, vertical flue.

At the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary Raptor Hospital, we regularly respond to reports of Tawny Owls stuck in chimneys. In late 2025, we attended a call where a homeowner reported an owl unable to escape.

Fortunately, the bird had travelled far enough down the chimney that we were able to carefully reach up and safely retrieve it.

The risks for owls trapped in chimneys can be severe:

- Starvation and dehydration, which can be fatal if the bird is not rescued quickly
- Soot contamination and ingestion, leading to toxic effects when the bird tries to clean its feathers
- Physical injuries, including broken wings, bruising, torn talons and worn feathers from struggling to escape
- Eye damage, as soot can cause irritation or, in severe cases, corneal ulcers
- Overheating, which can make the owl drowsy, disorientated, and at risk of falling further down the flue
- Stress, which weakens the bird and compromises its overall condition

In this particular case, the owl was fortunate. It had only a small amount of soot on its feathers and was otherwise in good condition. After a thorough assessment at our Raptor Hospital, the soot was gently cleaned away. The owl remained in our care for a short period of monitoring before being successfully released close to where it was found.

Sadly, not all cases have such positive outcomes. In previous years, we have treated Tawny Owls heavily coated in soot, requiring multiple careful baths before rehabilitation could even begin.

A Simple Preventative Solution

However, there is a way to prevent Tawny Owls, and any birds, from entering your chimney - by fitting a bird guard cowl.

A bird guard cowl is a protective, mesh-covered fitting installed on top of a chimney pot. In addition to preventing birds and other wildlife from entering, it helps reduce downdrafts and keeps out rain and debris. Installing a bird guard cowl also prevents Jackdaws from nesting inside chimneys. Nesting material can accumulate and create dangerous blockages, increasing the risk of carbon monoxide build-up within the home.

At the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, we strongly recommend all chimneys are fitted with a suitable bird guard cowl or equivalent cover to protect Tawny Owls and other wildlife, while also safeguarding your home and household.

In areas where Tawny Owls, or other native species such as the Barn Owl and Little Owl, are known to be present, installing a suitably designed nest box can provide an alternative nesting site and help offset the loss of natural tree hollows. Nest boxes should be appropriate for the species, securely installed at a suitable height and location, and monitored responsibly to avoid disturbance during the breeding season.

What To Do If You Find an Owl in Your Chimney

- Do not light a fire.
- Close off the fireplace opening to prevent the owl entering your home.
- Keep noise and disturbance to a minimum.
- Contact your local wildlife rescue or rehabilitation centre immediately for advice.

Never attempt to remove the owl yourself; chimneys are narrow, unstable spaces and improper handling can cause serious injury to both you and the bird. If your chimney is not already fitted with a cowl, consider installing one to prevent future incidents and help protect local Tawny Owls.

By fitting a chimney cowl and providing appropriate nest boxes where suitable, we can reduce preventable risks and help replace lost nesting habitats. Small, practical actions like these make a meaningful difference to Tawny Owls and other native species living alongside us. If you encounter a bird of prey in need or would like advice on chimney covers or nest boxes, Suffolk Owl Sanctuary is always happy to offer guidance and support.

Bridging the Data Gap

A New Guide to Citizen Science and DNA Monitoring

Emma Aldous, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

Traditional biodiversity monitoring by professionals often faces significant hurdles, as it can be both time-consuming and resource-intensive. Consequently, many species and habitats remain understudied. To address these challenges, a new guide has been released by scientists at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and Natural England to help practitioners combine Citizen Science (CS) with DNA-based monitoring.

The Power of Collaboration

By leveraging the "CS x DNA" approach, researchers can expand the scale and impact of environmental observations. Citizen science involves the public directly in research, offering participants opportunities to build new skills, improve their wellbeing, and foster a deeper connection with nature. When paired with DNA-based methods, these volunteers can help detect species that are otherwise difficult to survey, such as those that are rare, endangered, or "cryptic" (physically indistinguishable from other species).

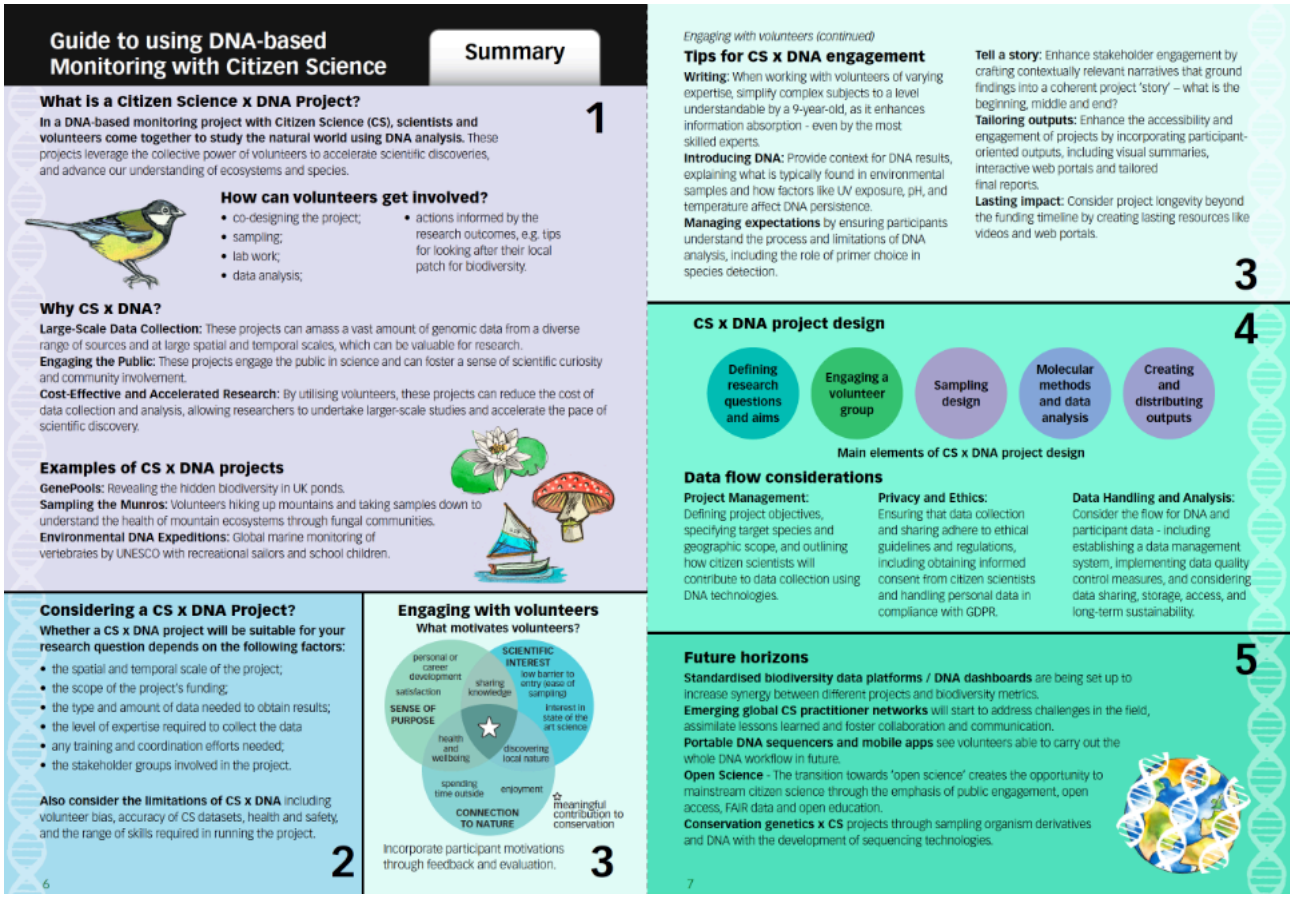
Practical Insights and Project Design

The guide provides high-level advice on several critical elements of project design:

- Volunteer Involvement: Volunteers can contribute at various stages, including co-designing projects, field sampling, and even laboratory work or data analysis.
- Sampling Protocols: DNA can be extracted from environmental samples (eDNA) like water, soil, or air, allowing for non-invasive monitoring of entire communities at once.
- Case Study: The guide uses the GenePools project – which studied the hidden biodiversity of garden ponds – to illustrate the process.

Looking to the Future

As technology advances, the scope for CS x DNA projects continues to grow. Emerging tools like portable DNA sequencers and mobile apps may soon allow volunteers to carry out the entire DNA workflow in the field. Furthermore, the transition toward Open Science ensures that data remains findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable (FAIR), driving better outcomes for both people and nature. [Read the guide]



Using our Hedgerow Data to improve hedgerows

Hannah Alred, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

Suffolk's hedgerows are more than field boundaries; they are monuments of historic land use and farming practices. They function as carbon sinks, reducing flood risk, and providing essential refuges for native species.

However, they face ongoing threats from development, agricultural intensification, and a lack of maintenance. To aid the protection and restoration of hedgerows, we have developed comprehensive mapping resources to help better understand the state of our local hedgerow networks.

Understanding the Data

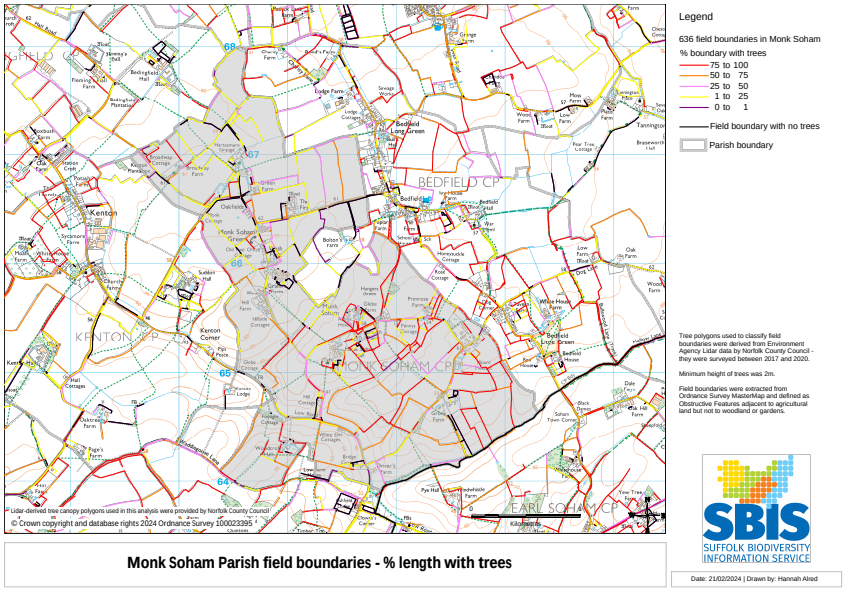
The SBIS hedgerow portal provides free, downloadable PDF parish maps and GIS data derived from high-resolution LiDAR and Ordnance Survey MasterMap datasets. These maps offer several layers of analysis:

- **Tree Volume per Metre:** This indicates the density of a hedge, with higher values representing more physical habitat and niches for wildlife.
- **Tree and Gap Sections:** These pinpoint specific gaps within a hedge. Ideally, a hedge should have as few gaps as possible to function as a wildlife corridor.
- **Percentage Length with Trees:** This metric shows which sections of a hedge have trees taller than 2m. Lower values may indicate younger hedges or those subjected to intensive management.
- **Mean Height and Height Variation:** Species have varied habitat needs; for example, Turtle Doves prefer hedges over 4m, but Yellowhammers prefer shorter ones. High variation in height suggests the presence of standard trees in the hedge line – the foundation of the next generation of ancient trees.

From Data to Management

The primary goal of this data is to inform practical management and restoration efforts. Based on the maps' findings, the following actions can be prioritised:

- **Restoring Connectivity:** For hedges identified as having significant gaps, managers should consider planting up with native saplings, or use coppicing and hedge laying to encourage dense growth at the base.
- **Structural Improvement:** Hedges that appear over-trimmed or uniform may benefit from a 2- or 3-year cutting rotation. Trimming slightly wider and taller each time prevents the formation of a "knuckle line" and preserves the hedge's structural integrity.
- **Protecting Priority Species:** Maintaining a diverse range of hedge sizes and ages supports a vast array of Suffolk priority species, including the Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*), Stag Beetle (*Lucanus cervus*), and Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*).
- **Seasonal Sensitivity:** To protect biodiversity, cutting should only occur from October through February, avoiding the bird nesting season and ensuring autumn berries remain available for wintering birds.



Monk Soham Parish field boundaries - % length with trees

Accessing Resources

SBIS provides these resources to empower local communities in their conservation work. A selection of parish maps is currently available for download, visit the **SBIS Hedgerow Portal**. If your specific parish map is not yet online, you can **request your parish map by email**.

By using this data, we can move toward a vision of Suffolk where the extent and quality of our hedgerows are not only maintained but actively improved for future generations.

Wildlife Wise grants to protect Suffolk's coastal wildlife

Fiona McConnachie,
East Suffolk Council

Organisations looking to deliver projects that help to protect vulnerable wildlife and their habitats on the Suffolk coast are being reminded of the grant funding that's available from Wildlife Wise.

Applicants can seek up to £5,000 to help ground nesting birds to breed and to allow sensitive wildlife habitats to flourish without disturbance from visitors. The funding can also be used to manage public access on the coast.

The types of projects that could be funded include implementing new signage, improving or rerouting paths, making car parking changes and improvements, or creating small areas of fencing to protect wildlife and their homes.

An example of a project that recently benefitted from this funding was led by the RSPB on Kessingland Beach to help protect ground nesting little terns, avocets, ringed plovers and oystercatchers. With the birds being sensitive to disturbance, a grant was given for the replacement and improvement of a small area of seasonal fencing, to be erected each spring before the birds arrive. This grant-funded fencing was supported by seasonal signs, along with regular monitoring and engagement with the public by Wildlife Wise rangers and RSPB staff and volunteers. As a result, the rare birds have been able to breed safely and rear chicks.

Sam Kench, Wildlife Wise, said: "Birds that nest on the ground are so sensitive to disturbance, that on beaches with lots of visitors and no fencing to protect them, the birds are rarely successful. Even one disturbance event from a person or dog getting too close can result in many nests failing at once. Chicks and eggs might be trampled accidentally, or they become vulnerable to the cold and predators with the adults scared off the nests."

The work at Kessingland, led by the RSPB and supported by Wildlife Wise, to give the birds protection with the support of the local community, resulted in exceptional numbers of fledged chicks in 2025.

Typically, anything over 0.75 chicks fledging per pair each year is considered enough to support a population increase. By giving these rare birds, a safe, fenced off zone on Kessingland Beach, accompanied by excellent visitor engagement, the project in 2025 resulted in 26 avocets successfully fledging (1.73 chicks per adult pair), at least 8 little tern chicks (1.67 chicks per pair), and at least 10 ringed plover chicks (0.83 chicks per pair).

Sam said: "With incredible numbers of successfully fledged birds like this, from a low-cost project, we are so enthusiastic about what out grants can achieve. With funding still available, we are calling for our partners to get in touch to see if their project can benefit from it. Whether it's to solely fund something that can help protect vulnerable species and their habitats, or it's to match fund a larger project, we are asking organisations to get in touch to explore how we can make a lasting impact together."

The Wildlife Wise Project Fund supports priorities within the Suffolk Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy.

To find out more and to **apply for a Wildlife Wise grant**.

For more information, please contact **Wildlife Wise**

Field Notes

The People Protecting our County: A Deeper Look

Behind every map, every planning response, and every biodiversity record is a person with a passion for the Suffolk landscape. While many of us know our colleagues by their email signatures, we rarely get to see the "why" behind their work. In this new series, we are going beyond the job description to uncover the stories, the drive, and the occasional mud-splattered reality of life in the Natural Environment team. This month, we sit down with someone who helps keep Suffolk wild, our very own Hannah Alred, Biological Records Officer (GIS).

The Quick-Fire Round

- **Wellies or walking boots?** Walking boots – despite the picture! We got absolutely soaked that day.
- **Early bird in the field or night owl in the office?** Early bird in the office.
- **The one Suffolk species that always makes you stop?** Bluebells carpeting the woods. My favourites since childhood have been at Reydon Wood.
- **Essential kit?** A flask of hot chocolate – especially with all the grey weather we've had lately.
- **Desk view or site view?** Usually desk view. I love looking at interesting maps or plotting our County Wildlife Sites and Native Black Poplars.

The Deep Dive

- **How do you describe your role to someone outside the world of local government?** As a Biological Records Officer specialising in GIS (Geographic Information Systems), my role is to ensure our species and habitat data is spatially understood. I create datasets and make them available to those who need them – from councils and developers to charities and water companies. This allows for informed, data-led decisions on everything from development mitigation and wildlife crime to neighbourhood planning.

  A good example is the Ancient Woodland Inventory update SBIS completed for Natural England. Our research increased the mapped area of ancient woodland in Suffolk by 53% and mapped ancient wood pasture for the first time. These woods now have vital protection under the National Planning Policy Framework.
- **The "Spark" Moment: Was there a specific memory that set you on this career path?** From an early age, my parents were part of a local coppicing group led by Richard Woolnough. He showed us how to spot mammal tracks and newts, identified mushrooms, and taught us bird calls. We also had bi-annual work parties at a cottage near Dunwich, clearing gorse and building dens. Between those experiences and the influence of David Attenborough and Greenpeace, there was never any question that I would study Environmental Science.
- **The Hidden Challenge: What is one aspect of your job that might surprise people?** Data gaps. A blank space on a map for a species doesn't mean it isn't there; it just means it hasn't been recorded. "Absence of evidence" does not equate to "evidence of absence," which is a tricky concept to communicate visually. I prefer to view a data gap as an invitation to go out, investigate, and help us create a fuller picture.
- **The Suffolk Legacy: If you could fast-forward twenty years, what change do you hope your work will have achieved?** I hope my work will have helped create a truly "joined-up" Suffolk. Currently, our wild spaces can feel like isolated pockets. My goal is for our mapping to provide the evidence needed for green corridors that allow wildlife to move freely. I want to see a landscape where data-led conservation has bridged the gaps between habitats, making Suffolk more resilient to climate change and richer in biodiversity.
- **The Motivation: When the paperwork piles up and the skies are grey, what is your "why"?** My motivation comes from my colleagues. Within the SBIS team, we are constantly striving to improve our services. We work closely with the Ecology and Landscape teams on projects like Roadside Nature Reserves, and our links to the Suffolk Naturalists' Society provide a depth of knowledge that always teaches me something new. Seeing the tangible outcomes my colleagues achieve inspires me through those inevitable grey days.

In our next issue we'll be talking to the Norfolk and Suffolk Nature Recovery Partnership Manager, Jen Burlingham

Community called to support bat conservation in 2026

University of Suffolk

Greater Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) © Ethan, iNaturalist

In gardens across Woodbridge, small ultrasonic microphones are quietly listening for bats.

Built by local residents at community workshops, the low-cost devices connect to mobile phones and record wildlife sound data that is then sent to the University of Suffolk for analysis. It is citizen science at its most practical – and it is already producing results.

The project is a collaboration between the University of Suffolk and Transition Woodbridge, and has been running for several years. Researchers and students from the University's Wildlife, Ecology and Conservation Science course use the data to track bat populations and biodiversity across the area. Bats are used as a 'signifier species' – their presence, absence, and behaviour reflecting the broader health of the local environment. Changes in bat activity can indicate shifts in insect populations, habitat quality, and the wider ecological health of an area, making them an invaluable tool for monitoring biodiversity over time.

Suffolk is home to at least fourteen bat species, several of which are known to roost and forage in and around Woodbridge. Common and soprano pipistrelles are frequently recorded in gardens and along river corridors, while Daubenton's bats hunt insects low over the surface of the River Deben. Less frequently recorded species such as the Nathusius' pipistrelle and Natterer's bat have also been detected in the area, and the project hopes to build a clearer picture of where these species are active and how their populations are changing.

Three workshops have already taken place, with participants ranging from local school students and families to adult volunteers. Each workshop teaches attendees how to build their own detector and how to pass that knowledge on to others. The atmosphere at the workshops has been one of genuine enthusiasm – participants leave not only with a working device but with a new way of engaging with the natural world on their own doorstep. The project has been supported by East Suffolk Council through the Melton, Woodbridge and Deben Peninsula Community Partnership, which contributed £4,775 towards materials, venue hire, and two research assistants managing data collection.

The project also has a strong community wellbeing dimension. By bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds – including families from low-income and rural communities – it is helping to build connections between local residents and the natural environment around them. Conservation, at its most effective, is a communal endeavour, and projects like this demonstrate what becomes possible when scientific expertise and community enthusiasm are pointed in the same direction.

The workshops are open to all ages and no prior experience is needed. Building your own bat detector is a practical, hands-on way to contribute to genuine conservation research while learning something new. Keep an eye on the University of Suffolk **events page** for details of future workshops.

For more information about the BSc (Hons) Wildlife, Ecology and Conservation Science course at the University of Suffolk, visit the **course page**.

Bridging Science and Action

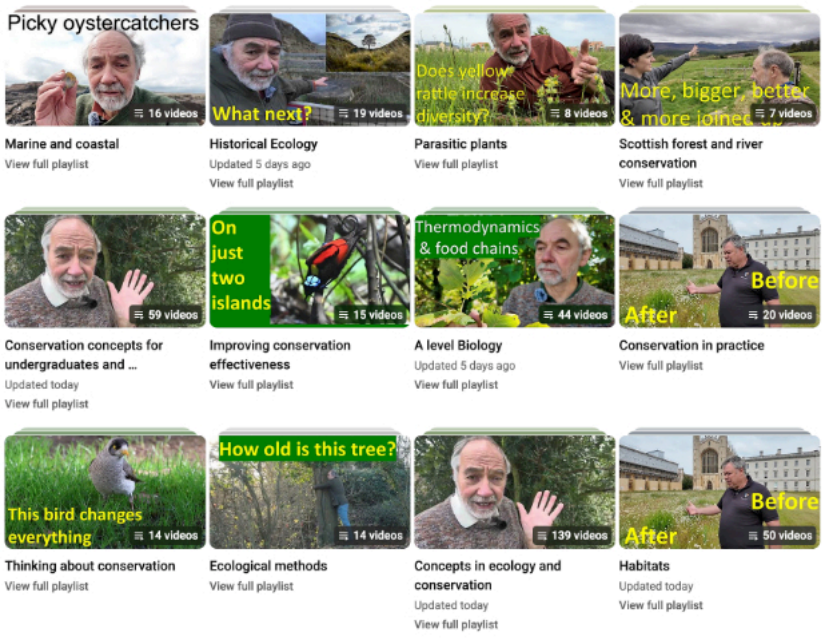
Emma Aldous, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service

Introducing the Essential Conservation Guides of Bill Sutherland: As biodiversity loss and climate change persist, clear, evidence-based solutions are essential.

Professor Bill Sutherland, a leading figure in conservation biology at the University of Cambridge, is meeting this challenge head-on, not just through academic papers, but through his engaging **YouTube channel, Bill Sutherland's Conservation Concepts**

With a career spanning over four decades, Sutherland has dedicated himself to the idea that conservation should be rooted in rigorous evidence rather than intuition alone. His channel serves as a digital classroom for anyone interested in the natural world, from students and professional ecologists to curious nature enthusiasts.

The videos offer a deep dive into the "why" and "how" of protecting our planet. Sutherland breaks down complex ecological principles into digestible segments, covering a vast array of topics:



- **Evidence-Based Conservation:** Discover how data-driven decision-making can prevent wasted resources and lead to more effective outcomes.
- **Landscape History:** Learn how centuries of human activity have shaped the modern countryside and what these historical "palimpsests" reveal about the potential for future restoration.
- **Practical Ecology:** Explore specific, real-world projects, such as the role of "disturbance" in forest regeneration.

What sets this channel apart is Sutherland's unique ability to blend high-level scientific expertise with a genuine enthusiasm for the subject. Whether he is explaining "habitat flattening" or discussing the genetic complexities of species reintroduction, his goal remains the same: to provide the knowledge needed to make a real difference in the world.

Those aiming to take effective, informed action to help ecosystems will find Bill Sutherland's videos an essential guide, bridging scientific knowledge with on-the-ground conservation solutions.

Learning and Events

Exploring the BSBI YouTube Channel: A New Era for Botanical Learning

The world of biological recording is changing quickly. The rush of new data and the tricky task of plant identification can feel like a tangled thicket. Still, in recent years, a quiet revolution has taken place. The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland has brought its expertise online and the **BSBI YouTube channel** has become a trusted companion for seasoned botanists and newcomers alike.

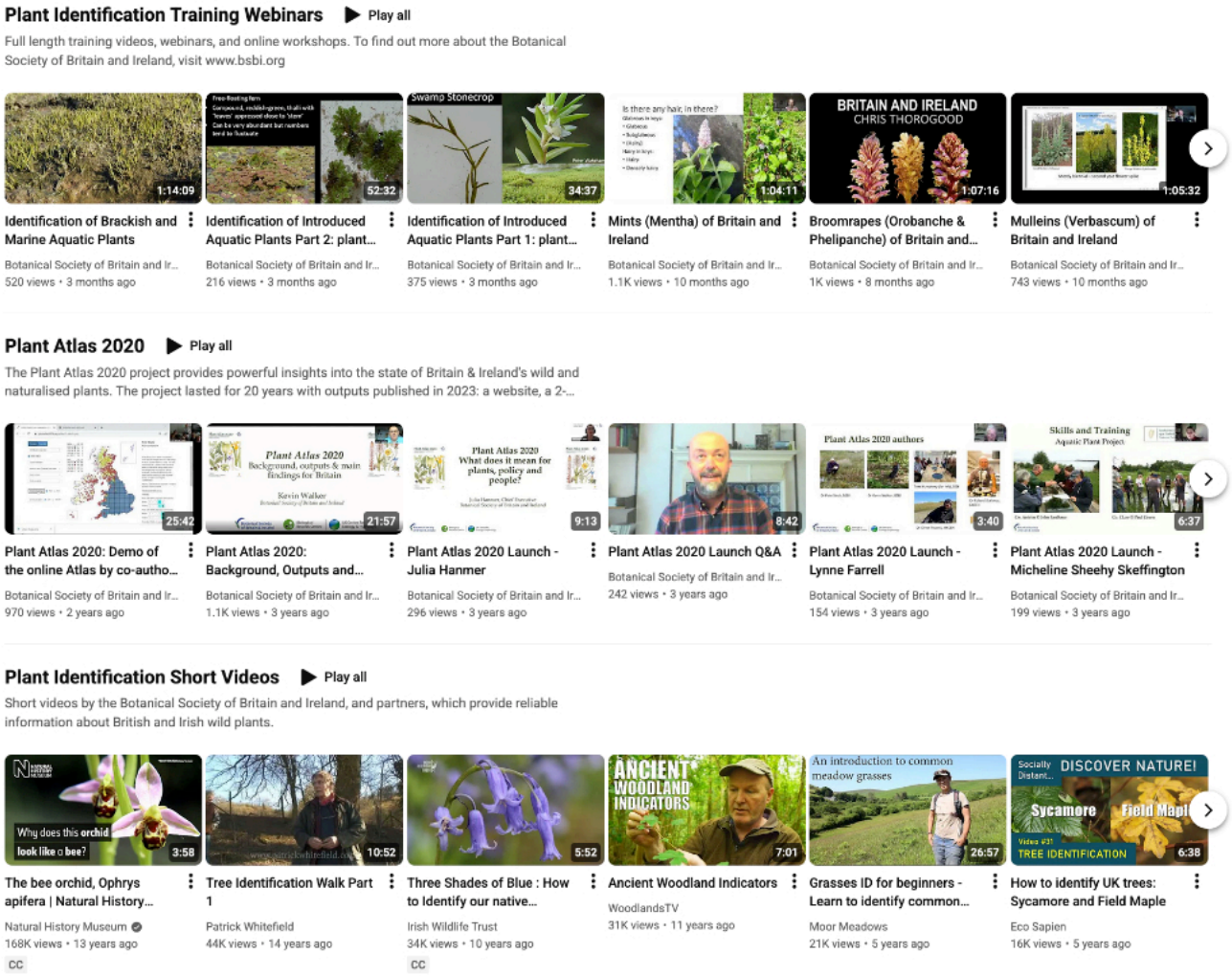
The channel brings the voices and knowledge of the UK's leading botanists right into your home. Are you keen to sharpen your eye for sedges? Are you curious about the findings from the Plant Atlas 2020? Here, a collection of clear, engaging videos is ready to guide you at every step.

Among the channel's treasures are its webinars and conference recordings. If you cannot attend distant meetings, these videos offer a window into national events – all from home. The talks often pair speakers with their data. Even complex maps and taxonomy become approachable.

The channel also offers glimpses into the daily life of a recorder. In one memorable video, Ciarán Flynn shares stories from his first year as a BSBI County Recorder. He captures both the challenges and small triumphs of the role.

The channel is also a living archive of the year's botanical highlights. Did you miss the New Year Plant Hunt? You can revisit the results to see how wildflowers respond to changing seasons. These recordings share stories from across the country and remind us that our records are part of a wider tapestry.

We invite you to explore the BSBI channel yourself. It is a great way to keep your botanical senses sharp, and to find inspiration before your next walk across the Suffolk heaths. By delving into these resources, we sharpen our skills. We also help the BSBI continue its vital work for our wild plants. Happy watching – and even happier recording.



Free online webinars

In preparation for the International Day for Biological Diversity on the 22nd May, we're excited to relaunch our Natural History Live series, kicking off with a full week of free, hour-long webinars. From the 25th May, join us to hear about recording schemes, conservation projects, and recent research. Perfect for anyone curious about the natural world, and no experience is needed.

Beyond No Mow May: Welcoming Wildlife All Year • 25 May
This webinar explores how lawns, gardens, and green spaces can support wildlife beyond the popular No Mow May campaign. You'll learn how simple changes to mowing regimes throughout the year can boost biodiversity.

The Wild Next Door: Discovering Garden Wildlife • 26 May
Discover the incredible variety of wildlife hiding in everyday gardens and parks. This session explores how to find and observe different creatures, and introduces easy surveys that anyone can use to connect with nature right on their doorstep.

Everyday Invertebrates: Learning to Recognise UK Minibeasts • 27 May
Designed for beginners, this webinar gives you a crash course in recognising the main groups of UK invertebrates. You'll learn key features to look for, simple identification tips, and how to build confidence talking about these animals.

Every Sighting Counts: Recording the Nature Around Us • 28 May
Find out how biological recording turns everyday wildlife sightings into meaningful data. This webinar covers how to use the iNaturalist app, top tips for making high-quality records, and what happens to your data once it reaches national recording systems.

An Introduction to myForest • 23 Jun
Explore myForest, a digital tool for woodland owners and managers. This session demonstrates core features, from woodland mapping and creation planning to sustainable management and compliance with forestry standards.

Exploring Resources for Studying UK Beetles • 6 Oct
This webinar gives an overview of the wide range of identification resources available for UK beetle species, discussing their potential use for different experience levels. It's ideal for those who are beginning their beetle identification journey, but also those looking to expand their natural history library.

Click for **Booking Information**

Other Field Studies Council Courses

- Botanical Folklore: Flora and Fungi • 24 Mar
- Discovering Spiders • 1 Apr
- Discovering Botany • 1 Apr
- Discovering UK Seals • 3 Apr
- Discovering Bees (Tutor-led) • 13 Apr
- Discovering Badgers: Biology, Ecology and Surveying • 13 Apr
- An Introduction to Small Mammal Surveying – Webinar • 27 Apr
- Looking Closer: Invertebrate Macrophotography – Webinar • 28 Apr
- Discovering Trees • 6 May
- Introducing Grasses, Sedges and Rushes • 8 May
- Lichens for Beginners • 9-10 May • Epping Forest
- Identifying Wildflower Families • 13 May
- Field Identification of Bumblebees • 18 May
- Beyond No Mow May – Webinar • 25 May
- The Wild Next Door: Discovering Garden Wildlife – Webinar • 26 May
- Discovering Reptiles: Identification and Ecology • 27 May
- Everyday Invertebrates – Webinar • 27 May
- Every Sighting Counts: Recording Nature – Webinar • 28 May
- A Weekend Among Woods and Wild Plants of the Dedham Vale • 29 May • Flatford Mill
- Wildflowers of Suffolk – A Guided Nature Walk • 30 May • Flatford Mill
- An Introduction to myForest – Webinar • 23 Jun

Natural History Courses:
Covering all aspects of the natural world for beginners, enthusiasts, volunteer recorders and professionals. **Browse 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. **Browse professional development courses**

Suffolk Wildlife Trust

- **Wildlife Live Webinar – Wilder Landscapes in action • 25 Mar • Online**
- Talk: Digger Alley • 25 Mar • Ipswich
- Talk: Gulls – more than just chip thieves • 14 Apr, Leiston • 24 Jun, Stowmarket
- Talk: Languard Nature Reserve • 21 Apr • Felixstowe
- Talk: The unnatural history of rivers • 22 Apr • Ipswich
- Nightingale Open Evening • 28 Apr & 8 May• Lackford Lakes
- Workshop: Exploring the hidden world of lichens • 2 May • Carlton Marshes
- Workshop: Spring wildlife photography • 9 May • Lackford Lakes
- Wild Skills: Wildlife Photography • 6 Jun • Trimley Marshes
- Wildlife open garden at Long Acre • 14 Jun • Theberton
- Workshop: Introduction to wildlife photography • 20 Jun • Lackford Lakes

Details of **all SWT events**

Biological Recording Company

- Thermal Vision for Bats: Practical Applications in Ecology • 25 Mar
- Bee-flies • 25 Mar
- Biodiversity and the UN Sustainable Development Goals • 31 Mar
- iRecord 101 • 2 Apr
- Revealing Insect Pest Pathways • 7 Apr
- Curlew Conservation: An Overview • 13 Apr
- Biological Recording Symposium 2026 • 15 Apr
- Endemic Vertebrates of the UK and Ireland • 16 Apr
- Soldierflies • 16 Apr
- Backyard Bees: Private Green Spaces and Pollinator Diversity in Cities • 22 Apr
- Endemic Plants of the UK and Ireland • 5 May
- Orbweb Spiders • 5 May
- Pan-Species Listing: How to Become a Super-Naturalist • 13 May
- Plant-Pollinator Interactions and the UN Sustainable Development Goals • 26 May
- Underexplored Freshwater Habitats in Ireland: Case Studies Using Riverflies • 28 May
- Friend, Foe, or Freeloader? The Flower Crab Spider • 2 Jun
- Fly Research and Conservation Symposium • 23 Jun
- Formica Ants • 30 Jun
- Can Infiltrators be Indicators? Understanding Cuckoo Bumblebees • 21 Jul
- Froghoppers • 23 Jul

Details of **all BRC events**

The Species Recovery Trust

- UK Wildlife and The Law • 23 Mar
- Summer Tree Identification for Surveyors • 25 Mar
- Around Britain in 25 Grasses • 26 Mar
- Botany for surveyors - Part 1 • 13 Apr
- Orchid Identification for Surveyors • 15 Apr
- Around Britain in 30 Bryophytes • 16 Apr
- Botany for surveyors - Part 2 • 20 Apr
- Around Britain in 20 Ferns and their Allies • 23 Apr
- Botany for surveyors - Part 3 • 27 Apr
- Heathlands and Acid Grassland - Species and Habitat Survey • 30 Apr
- Summer Tree Identification for Surveyors • 6 May
- Around Britain in 20 Rushes • 7 May
- UK Wildlife and The Law • 11 May
- Orchid Identification for Surveyors • 14 May
- Great Crested Newts - Ecology, Conservation and Survey • 18 May
- Woodlands - Botanical Survey Online • 21 May
- Badger Ecology, Survey and Mitigation • 1 Jun
- How to Survey and Assess Hedgerows using the Hedgerow Regulations • 4 Ju
- Botany for surveyors - Part 1 • 10 Jun
- Aquatic Plant ID • 15 Jun
- Habitat Indicator Species • 18 Jun
- Invasive Species • 22 Jun
- Botany for surveyors - Part 3 • 24 Jun
- Around Britain in 25 Sedges • 25 Jun
- Summer Tree Identification for Surveyors • 29 Jun

Details of **all SRT courses**

Brecks Landscape Partnership

Details of **all Brecks Events**

London Natural History Society

Details of **all LNHS Events**

Royal Entomological Society

Details of **all RES Events**

National Biodiversity Network

Details of **all NBN Events**