

# Biodiversity

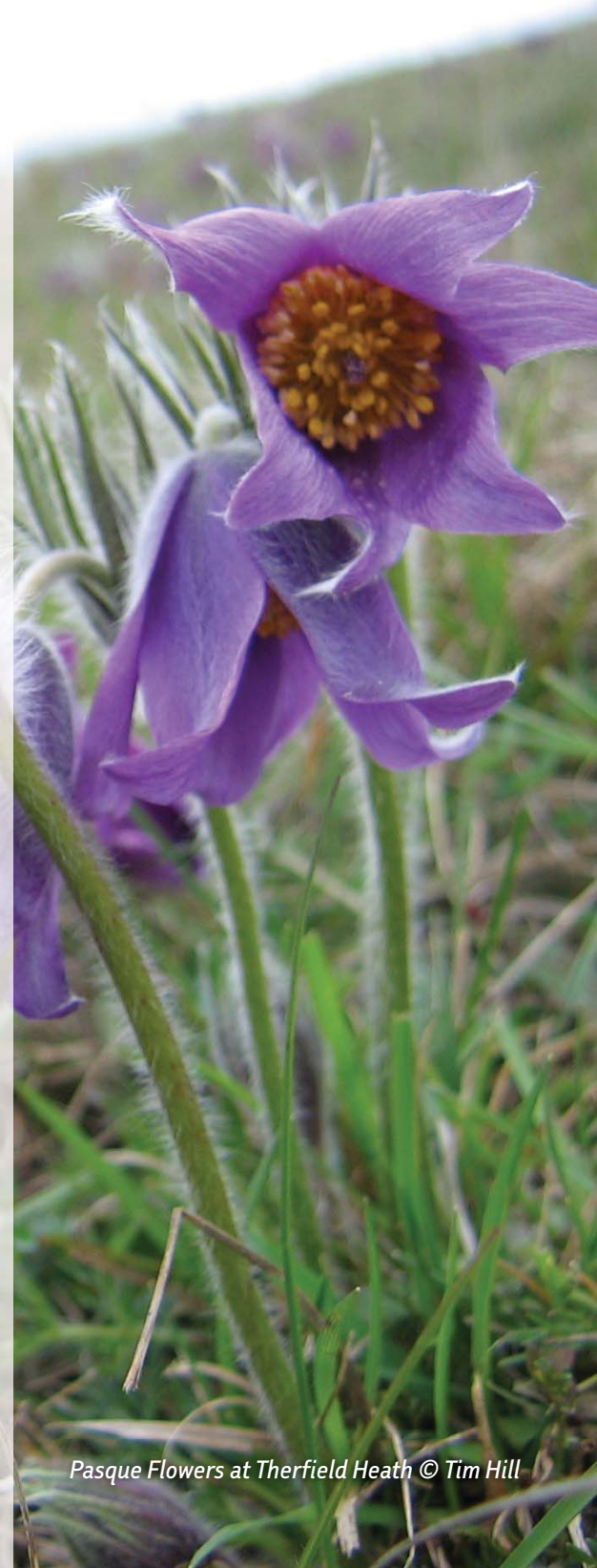
## Action Plan highlights 2010

# Introduction

Welcome to the 2010 review of the HEF Biodiversity Partnership Group. Inside you can find out more about the exciting range of projects being delivered by our partners which are all contributing towards the implementation of the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan. You can also read about how the grant awarded to us by HEF has been used to support the delivery of the Black-necked Grebe, Purple Emperor and Traditional Orchards action plans. These are just some examples of the work the partnership is doing to conserve and enhance Hertfordshire's biodiversity.

An independent review of England's wildlife sites, how they are linked up and how they will be able to respond and adapt to the future challenges and pressures placed on our land, was published in the Autumn. The long-term vision identified within the *Making Space for Nature* report is one of working in partnership to deliver a more coherent and resilient wildlife providing in essence, *more, bigger, better* and *joined* sites. The Biodiversity Partnership is already contributing to this vision by adopting the Key Biodiversity Areas as the county's 'Living Landscapes', a strategic approach to landscape scale delivery for biodiversity.

2010 was declared by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Year of Biodiversity and the campaign succeeded in engaging nations worldwide on the importance of protecting biodiversity. Following the conference of the Convention on Biological Diversity in October 2010, the UN General Assembly declared 2011-2020 the UN-Decade of Biodiversity recognising its overall significance for sustainable development.



*Pasque Flowers at Therfield Heath © Tim Hill*

## Heartwood Forest is growing

The Woodland Trust's *Heartwood Forest* is growing from strength to strength. Sited at Sandridge in Hertfordshire, this new 850 acre forest started life in 2009. The final aim of 600,000 broadleaved trees being planted is well underway with 210,000 saplings already in the ground. Each tree will be planted by a volunteer and so far 9,000 school children and 8,000 people from local communities have participated in tree planting events. A wide variety of walks, talks and hands-on activities encourage greater appreciation of the forest, and new areas including a community orchard, are being developed for all to enjoy.



*Planting of the first trees at Heartwood Forest Community Orchard © Judith Parry*

## Tree Sparrows in Hertfordshire

Herts Bird Club members continued the programme of supplementary feeding for Tree Sparrows over the winter in the area of the only breeding colonies near St Albans. The numbers of simultaneous nests, nesting attempts and eggs laid was the highest since systematic monitoring started in 1997 but the nest failure rate was very high and only 66 young fledged. This was mainly due to loss of eggs and young to predation, probably by a weasel, at one colony in mid and late season. The Club replaced some boxes and added new ones at both colonies. Nest boxes have been placed at a new site near Welwyn where birds have been seen in winter but these have yet to be used by Tree Sparrows.



*A volunteer installs new nest boxes © Ken Smith*

## Surveys of lichens and bryophytes on orchard trees

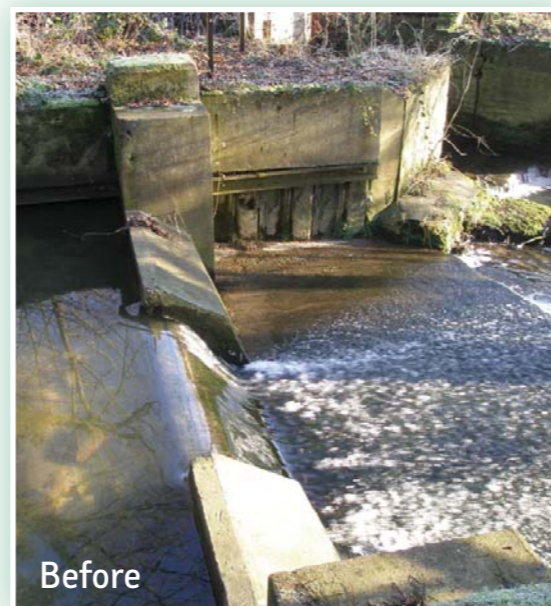
As part of a national Big Lottery-funded project, OPAL (Open Air Laboratories), surveys of lichens and bryophytes growing on orchard trees are being linked with orchard management practices and experimental research at the University of Hertfordshire. The results should help us understand some of the factors that may influence the biodiversity and distribution of these epiphytes in Hertfordshire orchards. Records will be submitted to the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre. Members of community groups are also being taught identification skills for these groups and encouraged to contribute to the surveys. Epiphyte diversity contributed to the formulation of the Priority Habitat status of Traditional Orchards under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.



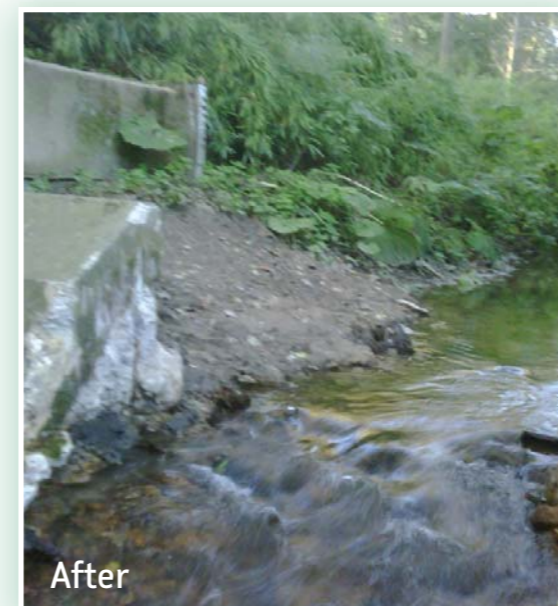
*Apple trees at Shenley Park - blossom and lichens © A. Burton*

## Top notch river restoration improves fish passage on the River Ash

Easeneye weir on the River Ash in Hertfordshire has been notched to enable fish passage and to provide increased habitat diversity. This collaborative river restoration project is the culmination of several years of planning and survey work conducted by the Environment Agency. Despite being subjected to modifications throughout history, the River Ash is species rich and considered to be one of the best rivers in east Hertfordshire, with relic native crayfish, brown trout and water vole populations present. Ecological and geomorphological surveys identified that Easeneye weir posed a significant obstruction to fish migration and that the associated deposition of sediment upstream of the structure compromised brown trout spawning habitat. It was recognised that cutting a notch in the weir would enable the free passage of fish and also facilitate in stream habitat diversity. To ensure displaced sediment that had accumulated upstream of the weir was not deposited on spawning gravels downstream, a series of flow deflectors were also installed.



**Before**



**After**

*Easeneye weir on the River Ash © Environment Agency*

## Creating new ponds in Hertfordshire

A study in 1986 revealed that in just less than a hundred years the number of ponds in Hertfordshire almost halved from 7007 in 1882 to 3595 in 1978. Many of these were lost due to intensification of agriculture, notably the change from pasture to arable. To continue addressing this loss Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust created 28 new ponds in the last year. This was made possible due to funding from Biffaward through the Million Ponds Project and the generosity of Trust members who donated to an appeal in 2009. In addition to this project the Trust also worked in partnership with the Environment Agency, East Herts Council and Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service to create eight new ponds and other wetland features at Hartham in Hertford.



*Digging a new pond at Cassiobury Park Nature Reserve © Tim Hill*

## Broadfield School goes wild



*County Councillor Ron Tindall cutting the ribbon at the official opening of the wildlife area © Emma Norrington*



*The newly created pond dipping platform © Emma Norrington*

Groundwork Hertfordshire have been working with Broadfield Primary School in Hemel Hempstead for the past year to develop their school grounds to enhance its wildlife habitats and also encourage more outdoor learning. Funding from John Laing PLC enabled Groundwork to kick start the project and create a wildlife area design which linked up the schools existing woodland area and orchard. Through excellent fundraising efforts by the school most elements of the design have been completed. Improvements so far include tree planting to extend the existing woodland and create a hedgerow, creation of a wildlife pond with pond dipping platform, creation of a wildflower meadow, building new pathways and the creation of a giant newt mud sculpture.

## Action for Water Voles in the Lee Valley

The Lee Valley is known to be a stronghold for Water Voles in Hertfordshire. Lee Valley Regional Park Authority has undertaken improvements to 2km of the Small River Lee and its tributaries to improve habitats for Water Voles. The banks of the river had become overshadowed and it is hoped that the removal of trees will encourage emergent vegetation to grow providing cover and food for Water Voles, allowing the resident population to expand. Some of the works have been carried out as a part of a wider £178,000 project funded through the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund to improve access and habitats around the west side of River Lee Country Park.



*Habitat enhancements on the small River Lea, Cheshunt © Dawn Richardson*



*Wet woodland © Tim Hill*

## Wet woodland audit of the Stort Valley

In pursuit of a landscape scale approach to conservation, in the east, with funding from the Forestry Commission, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust completed a wet woodland audit of the Stort Valley. Wet woodland is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitat and this project contributed to delivering actions in that plan by identifying existing wet woodlands, where these could be restored or extended and pin pointed opportunities for creating new woodlands. The recommendations from the plan will be taken forward by the Stort Valley Partnership.

## Funding for biodiversity delivery

In June 2010, HEF awarded the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Partnership a grant to enable a small Biodiversity Projects Fund to be established to support partners in the delivery of the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan. To date this grant has been used to support the delivery of the Black-necked Grebe, Purple Emperor and Traditional Orchards action plans. The main aims of the projects supported were to:

- Increase the area of breeding habitat for Black-necked Grebes at their only known breeding site within the south of England. The works included removing shading scrub and trees from the southern shoreline to allow light to the shore and shallows. This will allow existing pockets of reedbed to spread, providing opportunities for more birds to breed at the site.



Black-necked Grebe © Tim Hill

- Carry out sallow surveys in woodlands within the north west, north and north east of the county to assess whether the habitat is suitable for the Purple Emperor butterfly. This process of habitat assessment by Butterfly Conservation volunteers has proved highly successful in the woodlands of south Hertfordshire over the last 10 years.



Male Purple Emperor  
© Laurence Drummond



Orchard at Shenley Park - one of the sites surveyed © A. Burton

- Enable Hertfordshire Orchards Initiative (HOI) to carry out lichen surveys and prepare species lists for 10 orchard sites across the county. This information should assist in the identification of Traditional Orchard Wildlife Sites when the new Wildlife Site criteria have been developed.

## Call for ideas on the Natural Environment White Paper

The Hertfordshire Biodiversity Partnership was one of over 15,000 people and organisations to respond to Defra's discussion document 'An invitation to shape the Nature of England', the Natural Environment White Paper consultation. The White Paper which is due to be published imminently will be a bold and ambitious statement outlining the government's vision for the natural environment, backed up with practical action to deliver that ambition. It represents an opportunity to change the way we think about and manage the natural environment, seeing it as a system and valuing the services it gives us.



## Hertfordshire's Living Landscapes

Hertfordshire's Biodiversity Action Plan identified 30 'Key Biodiversity Areas', based largely on information gathered by the Hertfordshire habitat survey, completed in 1997. These areas were seen as the priority for conserving the existing biodiversity resource but also the best opportunities for maintaining and creating large areas of quality habitat. These areas have now been reviewed to 28 and the Biodiversity Partnership has agreed these to be the county's Living Landscapes, following the Wildlife Trust's initiative to promote nature conservation at a large scale. This also ties in with one of the prime conclusions within the Lawton Review of nature conservation in the country, that wildlife areas should be 'more, bigger, better and joined'.

In the last year, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust has secured funding for three posts which will deliver landscape scale working over the next three years in Stevenage, the Colne Valley and South Hertfordshire's Woods. These projects will facilitate partnership based conservation and encourage local people to engage with their local nature and take part in its protection.



Lee Valley Living Landscape, King's Meads © Tim Hill

## Local Nature Conservation/Biodiversity

Wildlife Sites are the most important places for wildlife outside legally protected land such as Nature Reserves or Sites of Special Scientific Interest. There are 1930 Wildlife Sites in Hertfordshire, totalling 13,525ha, and covering 8.2% of the county.

In 2009 and 2010, the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust reported against the national biodiversity indicator (NI 197) on behalf of the Hertfordshire County Council. This identified the number of Local Sites (Wildlife Sites and Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites or RIGS) in Positive Conservation Management. The result for 2010/11 is 24.5%, a slight drop from the 09/10 result of 25%. This is due in part to an increase in the number of candidate Local Sites, the loss of a significant number of the older Countryside Stewardship Schemes which ended in 2005, and a tighter list of beneficial options from Natural England within entry level and higher level stewardship schemes. In April 2011 Government announced a new Key Data Set and NI 197 has been retained under the new name of 'Local Nature Conservation/Biodiversity'.

District	Total No of County Wildlife Sites	Total No of NI197 candidate Local Sites	No. of LSs known to be in PCM (% of total candidate LSs)	
Broxbourne	85	76	9	11.84%
Dacorum	241	218	62	28.44%
East Herts	582	455	105	23.08%
Hertsmere	128	100	22	22.00%
North Herts	332	281	83	29.54%
St Albans	197	153	46	30.07%
Stevenage	39	37	2	5.41%
Three Rivers	147	119	30	25.21%
Watford	34	28	3	10.71%
Welwyn Hatfield	201	174	37	21.26%
(AONB)	161	146	46	31.51%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>*1930</b>	<b>*1591</b>	<b>*390</b>	<b>24.51%</b>

2010/11 figures for NI197 provided by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

# Hertfordshire Environmental Forum

Hertfordshire Environmental Forum (HEF) is a county-wide group that undertakes sustainable development-based initiatives to raise awareness, encourage involvement and bring together key decision-makers to influence sustainable development policies locally and nationally.

## HEF members include:

- St. Albans City and District Council
- Dacorum Borough Council
- East Herts Council
- Groundwork Hertfordshire
- Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Hertfordshire NHS Environment Group
- Hertsmere Borough Council
- Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- Three Rivers District Council
- Watford Borough Council
- Welwyn Hatfield District Council

Five working groups have been established to achieve its aims.

These are the:

- Education & Promotions Group
- Energy Group
- Biodiversity Partnership Group
- Quality of Life Group
- NHS Environment Group

The Biodiversity Partnership Group includes local authorities, statutory agencies, nature conservation organisations and voluntary interest groups working together to help implement the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). A Hertfordshire Biodiversity Officer, funded by the Hertfordshire Environmental Forum, with support from Natural England, provides a driving force behind co-ordinating the delivery of the Hertfordshire BAP. This review summarises some of the key achievements of the Biodiversity Partnership over the past year in implementing the Hertfordshire BAP.

For more information on the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Partnership and the Hertfordshire BAP please contact:

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