

Protecting Wildlife for the Future

WILDLIFE

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MAGAZINE



Is yours
a Real
Wild
Child?

Issue No. 24



TEES VALLEY

Welcome

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Welcome to this issue of Wild Tees.

Dear Reader,

In this issue we bring stories of two very different animals that have responded well to conservation efforts, the barn owl and otter.

Otters had suffered from a long period of decline which was blamed on pollution, habitat damage and persecution. Although some people believe the species was never completely extinguished in the Tees Valley, with occasional reported sightings in the wilder beck valleys of East Cleveland, a confirmed return to the Tees was first noted at the turn of this century with signs and sightings becoming increasingly common and the first photographic evidence of a Tees Valley otter being claimed at the Trust's Portrack Marsh nature reserve in 2004. The species is now becoming well-established in the Tees Valley, with regular reports from the Tees at Bowesfield, from Lustrum Beck in Stockton and even the highly-urbanised Middlesbrough Becks.

By the early 1980's there was just one pair of barn owls in the Tees Valley; habitat loss, agricultural pesticides and an absence of nest sites having led to their steadily dwindling numbers. Thanks to concerted efforts, however, local barn owl specialists, Geoff Myers and Colin Gibson, were able to report that they had monitored 17 breeding pairs of barn owl in the Tees Valley last year, which had produced a combined total of 78 chicks; positive news and a sign of a healthy and growing population.

Sadly, not all of Tees Valley's wildlife is fairing quite so well and we are still seeing a decline in many species of animals and plants as land is developed, habitats lost and new pressures, such as the proliferation of waste plastic, emerge. Funding for everything that society needs seems tighter than ever, so your support, as a member of the Wildlife Trust, has never been more important.

Jeremy Garside, Chief Executive

CONTENT DESIGN & EDITING:

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IMAGES:

PHOTOGRAPHY AS CREDITED.
ALL UNCREDITED PHOTOS
PERMITTED FOR USE BY TEES
VALLEY WILDLIFE TRUST.

PRINTED BY:

NEWTON PRESS

FRONT COVER:

CHILDREN PLAYING

PHOTO SOURCES: DAVID
TIPLING/2020VISION

BACK COVER:

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PHOTO SOURCES: Roe deer and
badger by Jon Hawkins (Surrey Hills
Photography), peacock butterfly by
Amy Lewis, swallows by Richard Bowler
& hedgehog by Tom Marshal.

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WILD TEES IS PUBLISHED BY:

TEES VALLEY WILDLIFE TRUST, MARGROVE HERITAGE CENTRE,
MARGROVE PARK, BOOSBECK, SALTBURN-BY-THE-SEA, TS12 3BZ.

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REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 511068



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CONT/

ARE YOU AGED 16-21?

Find Your Bright Future as a
One Planet Pioneer

New Horizons for 'One Planet Pioneer' apprentices.

AT THE END OF NOVEMBER, our One Planet Pioneer apprentices (Jess, Emily and Zannah - pictured below), who have been training with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust full-time for a year, will be taking their skills and confidence onto pastures new as they apply to prospective employers. They have worked very hard towards completing a Level 2 City and Guilds qualification in Environmental Conservation and have developed good relationships with all members of staff here at the Trust. In addition to gaining a wide variety of practical skills in habitat management, the apprentices have been busy during the summer months assisting with an extensive programme of community-based events. We wish them all the very best in their own bright futures and look forward to hearing about all their successes.

But this is not the end of the Our Bright Future – One Planet Pioneer Project, which will continue with Big Lottery Funding until 2021. And so we are now looking to recruit a new team of four young people aged 16-21, who will start their training in January 2019. If you or someone you know, would like further information on training or volunteering with this project, please get in touch with Becky Stanley at: rstanley@teeswildlife.org



volunteer Spotlight

Barrie Metcalfe

Our Development Manager, **Jen Hagan**, tells us about a star in the volunteer firmament.

WE ARE INCREDIBLY LUCKY at Tees Valley Wildlife Trust to have the support of such talented and committed volunteers. In this Spotlight we wanted to thank someone who has not only dedicated many years to our cause, but has also helped almost every single member of staff with his willingness to take on the most varied of tasks.

In 2016, Barrie Metcalfe received our (most prestigious) Green Volunteer award and is a wildlife champion, whether here, at home, in the local community and even abroad. All of us at the Trust wanted the chance to say thank you and let everyone know what a great impact Barrie has had here and so, despite trying to stay out of the spotlight, this time (and about time) it's on him.

Barrie first volunteered for the Trust in 1994, when it was based at Kirkleatham Museum in Redcar.

"My happy days as a volunteer for TVWT started after my early retirement, 24 years ago, with a wife who wanted 'me out from under her feet'. As the Trust was just up the road it seemed the logical place to look for a day helping out. The tasks I have been involved with over the years have certainly been extremely varied, with everything from shop work, to desk filing and organisation, events preparation, computer database inputs and much, much more, but never boring."

Barrie is an avid fan of wildlife and, for many years now, has regularly put food out for hedgehogs in his garden. It is very clear how much Barrie loves wildlife when he starts chatting about his little nocturnal garden visitors. He has regular jaunts to Portugal, which we always love to hear about when he returns. Whilst on holiday he takes photographs of any species of birds, butterflies or flowers he does not recognize and tests our knowledge on identification when he returns!



More recently Barrie has helped out most with our increasing community engagement work through education and events. Behind every wildlife road show are our unsung heroes, like Barrie, doing stacks of preparation such as pre-cutting badges, photocopying activity sheets, laminating posters and filling take home packs for families. Our Wings of the Tees Officer Sarah, had this to say:

"We have lost count of the hours Barrie has spent cutting various wildlife shapes out of card, painting things, sticking things to other things. A lot of this can be very tedious and labour intensive work, but Barrie always gets on with diligence and a warm smile. He is a joy to have around the office."

All of his efforts have undoubtedly led to many people becoming members of the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust. He has also been involved with entering evaluation data from questionnaires which has helped us apply for many grants to continue our valuable work.

His assistance on so many different projects over the years has also resulted in the engagement of thousands of little children (and big children!). Helping with engagement at these events gives us even more opportunities to encourage our next generation of environmental stewards; it's impossible to put a price on that or to quantify it in any way.

Barrie also recognises just how important our less wildlife-focused work is and has been a great support to our Membership Officer, Jody:

"Barrie used to spend a lot of time making up the new members welcome packs. I would feel so guilty asking Barrie to do this for me, as I'm sure that being such an intelligent gentleman, he could have been put to better use, but he has excellent organisational skills and would put them to use with a smile and saying 'anything to help'. I can't tell you how grateful I am to Barrie for helping me at our busiest times."

We hope Barrie has gained as much from us as we have from working with him. He has told us how important volunteering has been to him:

"My Tuesday visits have given me the opportunity to meet and enjoy the company of a great many staff members, who have without fail been wonderful. It has given me a very fulfilling extra dimension to my life."

Ultimately, without Barrie we would have fewer members, fewer people engaged with the natural environment, less funding and the office simply wouldn't be such a happy place. Super star volunteer doesn't even come close!



Our East Cleveland Heritage Officer, **Kate Bartram**, tells us her exciting news about the 'Where the Wild Things Were' book and website launch.

OUR WELL LOVED 'WHERE THE WILD THINGS WERE' PROJECT has finally come to an end. After two action packed years of public and community engagement, where we have gathered and shared information on the last of the free roaming childhoods in East Cleveland, we have highlighting some of the profound impacts on wildlife and the landscape over nearly 90 years of memories. With funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund we recorded the memories of over 50 people and after many hours of editing, transcribing and compiling, with the support of a fantastic team of dedicated volunteers, we have developed two fantastic new resources.

Copies of the book are available at libraries across East Cleveland or from the Trust for £5.00 plus postage and packaging.

Photo credits: Book cover illustration inset by House of Type, boys swimming from East Cleveland Image Archives

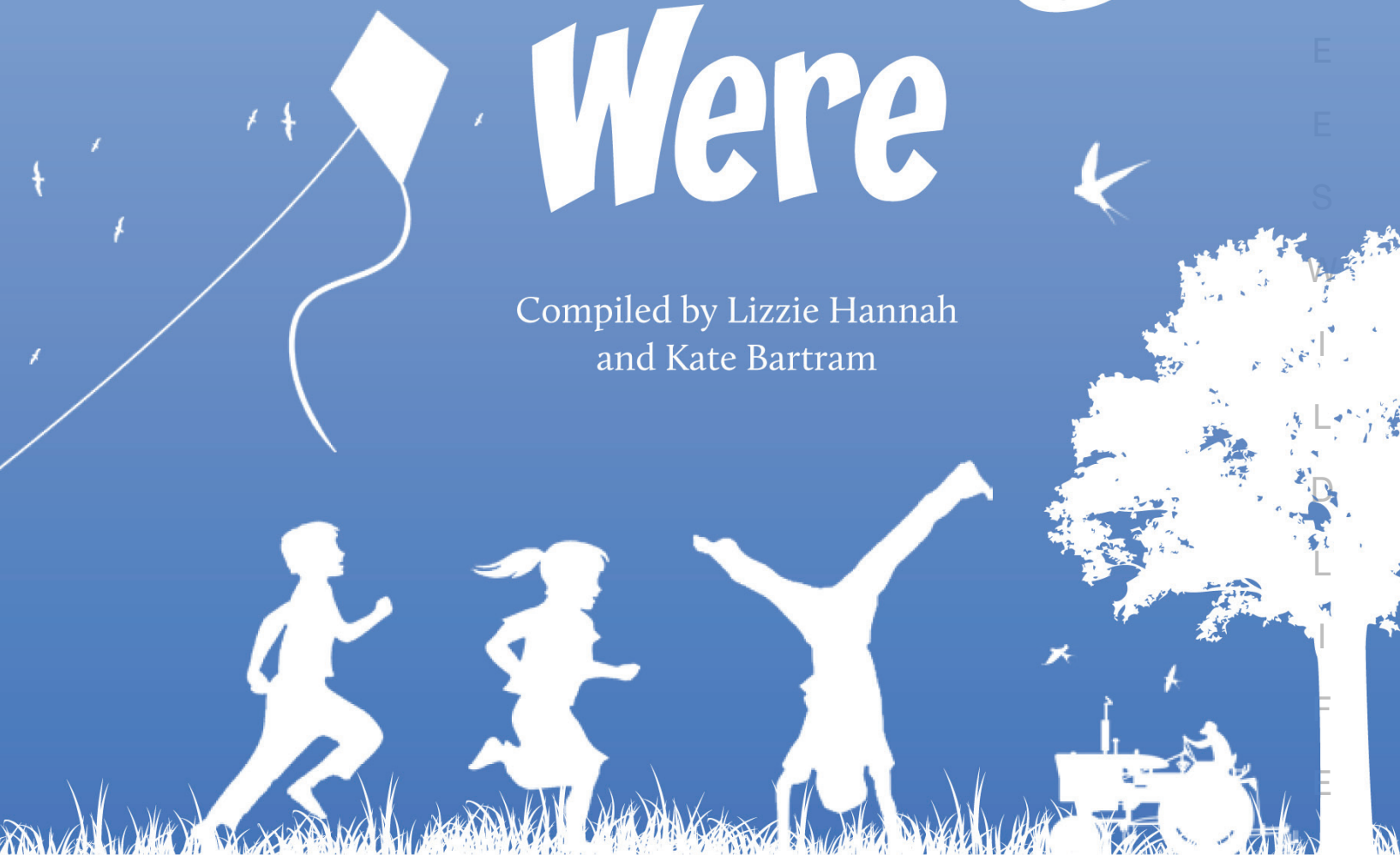


In October we gathered together our interviewees and volunteers to celebrate the end of the project and to launch both our listening webpage and our Where the Wild Things Were book. We also formally transferred all our recordings and records to Teesside Archives for safeguarding for future generations.

So that people could listen to the voices of our interviewees, Matthew Charlton and Francesca Zealley, students at Teesside University, developed a webpage as part of their digital media course. We have loaded over 200 sound clips from our interviewees of people talking about various memories linked to their place in the landscape. Lots of different icons relate to different themes from potato picking and collecting bird's eggs to memories of specific wild-

Where the Wild Things Were

Compiled by Lizzie Hannah
and Kate Bartram



life, such as water voles and red squirrels; the memories are sorted by childhood decades. If you fancy a trip down memory lane or would like to see how your parents and grandparents' childhoods compare to your own, then please visit: www.wildthings.teeswildlife.org

The book celebrates the essence of free roaming childhoods and is titled 'Where the Wild Things Were'. Lizzie Hannah, one of our volunteers, led the way by transcribing and editing many of the memories recorded in the book. You can read collections on childhood activities, such as making and using catapults, finding and eating wild food, wild pets and fishing, and all of it illustrated with archival and more recent photographs, as well as pictures of our inter-

viewees and interviewers as children. It is bound to evoke many memories of childhoods past, but is also a sobering reflection on those of the present.

Our celebration event was such a fabulous way to end what has been a really well supported project for the Trust. It has been wonderful to engage with older members of our East Cleveland community and discover the important contribution they can make to conservation through their experiences. We have heard many stories, some happy, some reflective and others that have been quite tragic. Every person we interviewed had something fascinating to tell us and each interview was thoroughly enjoyable. We are delighted that we can share these memories through the website and the book.



Making EVEN MORE hay while the sun shines!

Our Reserves
Manager, **Dan
van den Toorn**,
tells us about his
new pride and joy!



FOR MANY YEARS NOW, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust has been supported by Northumbrian Water Ltd. (NWL), both with funding and as partners in various projects to improve habitat and the safeguarding our wild spaces. Tees Valley Wildlife Trust currently plays a part in managing areas owned by NWL at Portrack Marsh, Scaling Dam and now a new site at Guisborough. This is a new site and has been laid predominantly to meadow. It also incorporates some pre-existing stream access, ponds and wooded slopes.

Wildflower-rich grazing pastures are an important feature of this area, providing a beautiful splash of colour through the summer months as well as supporting a wide variety of butterflies and other insects. Many of these can no longer be maintained in the traditional way with grazing animals because of their urban setting, so they need to be cut and raked each year or their wildflower mix will steadily decline and be replaced with coarse grasses. A decent machine is key to the future of these important habitats.

The Trust will continue to manage the meadow with a yearly cut, facilitated by generous funding towards new machinery to aid the cutting of wildflower meadows on both our respective land holdings.

We are now the proud owners of a brand new bank mower with a large (51 inch/130cm) reciprocating cutting bar (basically a big beard trimmer)! Now, despite what people say, in grass cutting terms size is everything, and with the new machine we can cut in one day what would have taken us two days with our older (smaller) machine. Add to this its ability to swap the cutting head for other accessories, such as a mechanical hay rake, and you can imagine that this has greatly increased what we can achieve with our time. It's also helping to make meadow management tasks less laborious for our hard working volunteers.

Our thanks go out to Northumbrian Water for their ongoing support.

BOXING CLEVER

We would like to give our winged wildlife friends a helping hand within the River Tees Rediscovered area, throughout the Tees Valley, and at our fantastic new nature reserve at Lazenby Woods. Boxes are required for small birds and bats, with different styles of bat boxes needed (as bats are fussy!).

We are looking for anyone who has the time to volunteer who may already be good with wood or are looking to gain more experience in working with wood. This voluntary role can be flexible. The boxes are to be made at the workshop at our Margrove Heritage Centre office.

For more information please contact Sarah Barry, Wings of the Tees Officer at: sbarry@teeswildlife.org or on 01286 636383.



ARE YOU GOOD WITH MACHINES? WILL YOU VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME TO HELP US?

WE NEED YOUR HELP AS A VOLUNTEER! Tees Valley Wildlife Trust have many machines that require regular maintenance - everything from strimmers to two-wheeled tractors, as well as a fleet of vehicles that need to be in the best shape possible for us to do our work.

Are you a retired mechanic? Are you inbetween work or looking for experience to put on a CV? We are looking for a volunteer with the right skills to help us with regular maintenance to ensure all our machinery is ready to go when we need it. If you think this is something you can help with or you would like some more information, please get in touch (if this sounds like someone you know, please tell them about this opportunity).

To help us choose the right candidate, please send us a short e-mail about yourself and your experience working with machines. We need someone with a friendly, helpful manner, who is willing to work in a busy workshop environment, alongside many other projects, staff and volunteers. Due to the nature of our work with young people and vulnerable adults, a criminal records check will be required before starting, but will be considered as part of a fair and equal opportunity volunteer recruitment policy.

Please contact us via the details at the front of this magazine. We look forward to hearing from you!

Going Wild in Hardwick Dene

Our People and Wildlife manager, **Steve Ashton**, tells us a tale of adventure in the wilderness, where a group of heroic children escape the clutches of the evil Tellybox ... at least for a little while.



ON AVERAGE, Britain's young people watch more than 17 hours of television a week: that's almost two-and-a-half hours per day, every single day of the year. And while nature does have more competition for the attention of today's children, there's significant evidence that children would really like to spend more time outdoors. And that is just what a small group of families and young people did as part of the Trust's 'Go Wild in Hardwick Dene' project, funded through Stockton-on-Tees Public Health - School Holiday Enrichment Programme.

The programme was developed because school holidays can be a difficult time for families without access to free school meals, but also because children's physical activity and educational attainment levels drop over these periods.

The Trust worked with Hardwick in Partnership to deliver a six week programme based in Hardwick Dene, which included

a healthy lunch for the children who attended. One of the highlights of the session was a picnic underneath a large poplar tree; we were even joined by a poplar hawk moth caterpillar, which fell into someone's sandwiches! The programme offered families and young people an opportunity to explore the nature reserve on their door step. The participants also had the chance to achieve a John Muir Award, which is divided into four parts - Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share.

Some of the families were discovering Hardwick Dene for the first time; they didn't realise they had a nature reserve right on their doorstep! Some of the children, on the other hand, already knew about the Dene, but didn't realise its value as a wildlife haven. We explored the site looking for butterflies and dragonflies, caught grasshoppers and woodlice, picked blackberries and cherries. In the pond, we found water boatmen, pond skaters and leeches, then the mallard ducks came to say hello. We built dens, made leaf prints and bark rubbings,

went bird watching and created natural art. To conserve the site we went on a litter pick, made bird feeders and insect hotels. We did lots of walking and played educational games that got everyone's hearts beating a little faster.

To share what they had done, everyone made their own log book, recording what they had done in photographs, words and pictures; some will be taking these back to school to share with the rest of their class. Everyone who came seemed to have a good time, including the mums and dads who joined in with everything. One child said, "We've learned more here than at school." Another said, "It's the best adventure I have ever been on!" These are crucial insights into the importance of outdoor play and outdoor learning; two things that are often hard to tell apart.

Children are not allowed to roam and play out of doors anymore! Statistics show in a single generation, since the 1970's, children's radius of activity - the area around which children are allowed to roam unsupervised - has declined by almost 90%. This and other statistics on the decline of childhood freedoms, have been backed up by the Trust's "Where the Wild Things Were" project, which has recorded the memories of childhood from generations past.

These circumstances can lead to "Nature Deficit Disorder", a condition which describes the human cost of alienation from nature. Among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses.

Not only do we need to give our children and young people the benefits of fresh air, natural light, open spaces and a sense of freedom, but we must recognise that it also frees them for a time from the stresses of modern life (as it frees us all, no matter our age). So, whether you take your children or grandchildren to the park, nature reserve or local green space or get involved in @30DayWild, it is vital that they (and you) get the opportunity to be in touch with nature, to make shared memories that will shape them into adults who will pass on the joy of nature to their own children.



No blank stares, no apathy - just children being fully engaged in what they do best - eking out every last bit of enjoyment from the day and working up a healthy appetite doing it!





Our Reserves manager,
Dan van den Toorn,
relates some very compelling reasons why being good to the planet is better for you than just being good to yourself.

Reproductive Health and the Environment - Our Fates are Tied

HUMAN MALE FERTILITY HAS HALVED IN THE LAST 40 YEARS! Why, you might ask, is this shocking statistic featuring in a Wildlife magazine? Because the environmental conditions we are creating for ourselves are one of the chief causes of this decline. And it's not only affecting human fertility - fish, frogs, bees, birds... - almost all life around us is experiencing the side effects of our toxic ways of living.

population decline. Many environmentalists would suggest that population decline in humans is no bad thing (from the standpoint of fewer humans = lower environmental pressure - assuming we carry on the way we have up to this point). But as a species who prides itself on self-determinism, we are looking woefully fatalistic in our limited efforts to save ourselves - from ourselves! (Will future technologies really save us from the hard choices?)

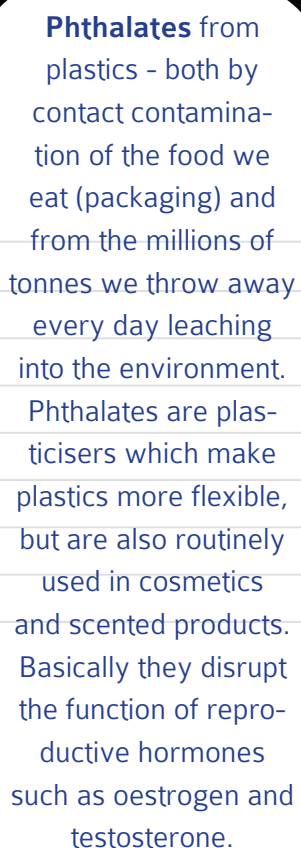
Current studies have been connecting drastically increased rates of infertility in human males to singular or combined chemical residues from human waste in the environment. This is happening both through individual exposure and mother to son *in utero*. While medical interventions, such as IVF, allow a certain amount of 'course correction' in our own species, the wider environmental damage may very well nudge us back onto a path of human

It is important to remember a few things: many of these contaminants have been around and in our environment for some time now (phthalates, for example, were discovered in the 1920's and widely replaced the volatile additive, camphor, shortly thereafter). This would suggest the current effects are just the tip of the iceberg. Many of the hormonally reactive agents in pharmaceuticals are potent even after they have been excreted and often find

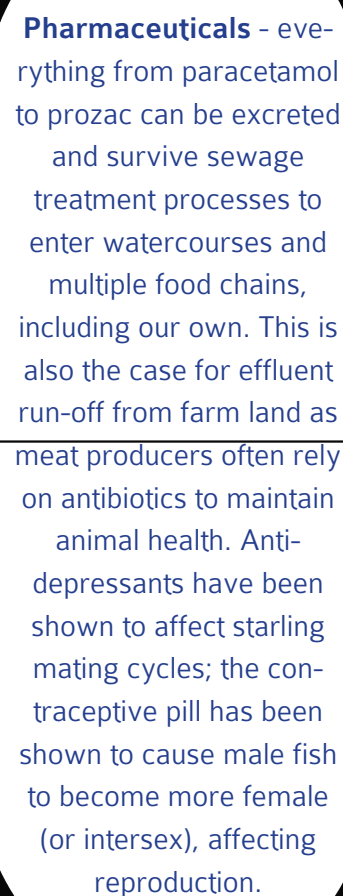
Notable among the chemical toxins we routinely release into the environment are:



Pesticides - neonicotinoids, which have been shown to be lethal to bees, are currently being reviewed by the EU, however a touted replacement based on sulfoximine (which has already been regulated for use in Canada, Australia and China), has been shown (by UK research) to reduce bee reproductivity and thereby threatens further population decline.



Phthalates from plastics - both by contact contamination of the food we eat (packaging) and from the millions of tonnes we throw away every day leaching into the environment. Phthalates are plasticisers which make plastics more flexible, but are also routinely used in cosmetics and scented products. Basically they disrupt the function of reproductive hormones such as oestrogen and testosterone.



Pharmaceuticals - everything from paracetamol to prozac can be excreted and survive sewage treatment processes to enter watercourses and multiple food chains, including our own. This is also the case for effluent run-off from farm land as meat producers often rely on antibiotics to maintain animal health. Anti-depressants have been shown to affect starling mating cycles; the contraceptive pill has been shown to cause male fish to become more female (or intersex), affecting reproduction.

their way into our watercourses, having eluded filtration in outdated sewage treatment works. Many pesticides are easily absorbed and migrate through the foodchain, having harmful effects beyond their target species.

So what is the answer to this tale of woe? Governments will legislate, scientists will devise new-and-improved chemical compounds to suit our needs; big pharma will never stop finding new ways to market our infirmity, but at least outdated sewage treatment methods might be replaced with higher levels of filtration... But what can **we** do?

Or is the key question - always - '**what can we do without?**' Instead of telling you how to replace one need with another, less harmful one; instead of reinforcing the recycle message (which we all know by now, but is actually not the complete solution we

have been led to believe - many millions of tonnes of plastic sent for recycling are still ending up in landfill because it is unwashed or otherwise contaminated). Instead, I'm going to say - **be mindful and practice abnegation - literally: give something up!**

Look at the plastic in your home, is there anything you can do without? Give up buying bottled water and get into the habit of filling a re-usable one from the tap. Reduce the need for pharmaceuticals with lifestyle choices that positively affect health and well-being (getting out into nature is one of the best). Give up on the expectation of perfect fruit and veg, all year round; buy organic or grow your own - over-intensification of farming and pesticide use are reactions to public demand and the market forces used to drive that demand. Remember, our buying habits influence what we are sold; if you want your money to go towards a better future, don't be sold a bad one!

The great otter comeback

Forty years ago, pollution and habitat destruction had almost wiped out otters in England. But times change

Last August, an otter was found dead in Sussex. It might sound like a tragedy, but in many ways it is a cause for celebration. Otters had made a miraculous comeback across many areas of the UK, but in the South East the population was recovering more slowly: this was evidence indicating that otters are present, even if in small numbers.

"We have waited a long time for otters to return," says Fran Southgate from Sussex Wildlife Trust. "We have lost vast areas of natural wetland, and few of our rivers and wetlands can be seen as natural or healthy. Otters are only just beginning to re-colonise the South East. It is fantastic to think that within the next 10-20 years, they may regain their previous population levels



Miriam Darlington is the author of *Otter Country* (2012) and *Owl Sense*.

across the UK. If they do, it will be in part due to efforts by The Wildlife Trusts, the Environment Agency, Water companies and many others to clean up our rivers."

There is more to celebrate than the simple presence of otters, however. With the benefit of science we now understand the complex relationship between predators and their ecosystems. In Yellowstone, USA, reintroduced wolves have improved biodiversity.

Off the west coast of the US, a recovering population of sea otters have helped restore kelp beds – a crucial habitat and absorber of CO₂ – by feeding on the sea urchins that were wiping the kelp out.

So if a predator is under threat, there is a serious issue to address. The otter in Britain is a prime example, where it plays an important role in the ecosystems of our rivers.

From the Industrial Revolution, the otter began to suffer a decline from persecution, pollution and damage to its habitat. Following the Second World War, its situation worsened due to the proliferation of agricultural poisons and the most misguided period of land management in history, when rivers were straightened and cleared of bank-

“We need farming and industrial policies that help us keep our otters



Utterly at home in the water, an otter polishes off an eel for Laurie Campbell's camera



How to spot an otter

Get up early

- 1** Dawn and dusk are the best times. It is also when much other wildlife is most active. Their behaviour may give away an otter's presence

LAURIE CAMPBELL

side vegetation. Once widespread, the otter began to vanish. By the 1970s, it was facing extinction.

The recovery that followed is remarkable, but new threats are replacing old ones. Pollutants such as fire-retardant chemicals used in clothing, carpets and household furnishings can leach into rivers. These chemicals have been found to impair reproduction and immune functions in seals, and concentrations have been found in the livers of otters.

CHRIS GOMERSALL/2020VISION. INSET: RICHARD ASUSTIN



Otters are happy in the sea too. Look for them on quiet Scottish beaches



Observe other animals

2 Otters are formidable predators. A flock of ducks suddenly swimming rapidly one way, glancing over their shoulders, could be a sign of an otter nearby.

Look for other clues

3 A tell-tale trail of bubbles might mean the otter has seen you first! Belly-slide marks into water, paw prints on mud, and poo (spraints) are all promising signs.

Get lucky

4 Otters are now on every river catchment in the UK. They have even been seen in the heart of some of our biggest cities, so you never know...

The Wildlife Trusts are part of Blueprint for Water, a coalition of charities working with Government to restore the UK's rivers, lakes and waterways to meet the European Water Framework Directive's deadlines.

As we leave the EU, it's critical that we retain strong regulations about what goes into our rivers. That includes farming and industrial policies that help us keep our otters, and continue their amazing comeback.

What a recovery

The 1977-79 map shows recorded signs of otters from the first *Otter Survey of England*. The later one gathers together 1995-2016 presence data. It is taken from The Mammal Society's *A Review of the Population and Conservation Status of British Mammals: Technical Summary*.

1977-79



1995-2016



“My dad ploughed up hedges; I planted them.”

What does it take to be a wildlife-friendly farmer? Simon Barnes finds out from Guy Tucker

We forget about the passion for land. We are, more than ever, city people these days. We talk about real estate, and think that land is something to do with money, and that the land becomes better – ie more valuable – as soon as you’ve got planning permission to build on it. We’ve forgotten that land is life.

Human life, yes, and many other kinds of life as well. And that can stir the most profound feelings in the human soul, not for what kind of income the land will generate, but

“**You have to work four or five years ahead**”

what kind of life can spring from it. A gardener knows something of this; a farmer knows a great deal more.

I was walking with Guy Tucker, around his farm in Hertfordshire, and it was clear from the first step that he is a man of passions. Farming is a

business, sure, but offer Guy a non-farming business with twice as much money and half as much work, he’d turn you down flat.

His family have been farming the same land for three generations. It was a beltingly hot day, and we took a cut through woodland past the places where Guy played as a boy. From the shade we looked out at tall hedges, wide field margins, areas planted for pollen and nectar, wild bird cover.

We have grown accustomed to the notion that farming and wildlife

Jordans supplier Guy Tucker manages more than ten per cent of his farm for wildlife

MATTHEW ROBERTS



Simon Barnes is a sports and wildlife journalist, and author of *How to be a Bad Birdwatcher*





Guy is passionate about combining farming and wildlife



Properly maintained hedges shelter birds and mammals



Wide field margins feature nectar and pollen bearing plants



And there's still plenty of crops for a sustainable business

conservation are incompatible. Farmers have been seen as the enemy of wildlife – and if there is some truth in that, it's a view that's a generation out of date here.

"My father was one of the worst," Guy remembered. "And his neighbour was just the same. But that's changing. My father ploughed up hedges; I've planted them."

Guy runs one of 40 farms that supply Jordans with the oats they make their products from. A partnership between Jordans and The Wildlife Trusts (see panel below) requires the farmer to manage at least ten per cent of farmland for wildlife. Woodland doesn't count. Guy is well over that ten per cent.

The total for all Jordans farms is more than 4,000 hectares managed

for wildlife: buzzing with bees, flashing with butterflies, jumping with mammals and singing with birds. The scheme is important for what it does; and also because it shows what can be done.

Guy was drawn into this creative way of managing land by changes in farming. Mixed farms – combining arable and livestock – became unprofitable and the Tucker family were forced to sell their cattle. Guy felt he was ready, as one of the next generation, to take on new challenges, and make them work financially.

And that is always the greatest challenge in

farming. "You need a solid base to your business to be able to do this," he said. "You have to work constantly four or five years ahead."

We passed a handsome badger sett in the wood. From the harsh blue sky a buzzard yowled suddenly. Guy's farm has the biggest population of linnets and bramblings in the county.

And why not? It's all the same thing: managing land so that it supports more life. In the UK, 70 percent of all land is farmed: it's thrilling that an increasing amount of the life supported by farms is wild, and vital that it continues.



Look for our logo on packets of Jordans cereal

Here's what we're achieving

The Jordans Farm Partnership with The Wildlife Trusts assigns an advisor to each farm from the local Wildlife Trust. Using their expertise on the local area, the advisors develop a bespoke farm plan, focussing on key species and habitats relevant to the farm's local landscape.

**Total area of habitat
4,580
hectares**

**Total area of farmed land
15,500
hectares**

**All 40
Jordans
farms**



**954 hectares
of woodland**



**768 km
hedgerows**



**131 km of
waterways**



**94 wildlife
ponds**



Our East Cleveland Heritage Officer, **Kate Bartram**, tells us how owl pellets can reveal as much about the prey as it can about the predator.

Barn Owl Project Like Pulling Teeth, but in a good way!

Photo credits: Barn Owl by David Tipling/2020VISION, Harvest Mouse by Charles Thody, rodent bones by Liz Musgrove, Wood Mouse by Sue Lloyd, Field Vole by Margaret Holland, Water Shrew by Niall Benvie, Common Shrew by Carl Wright.

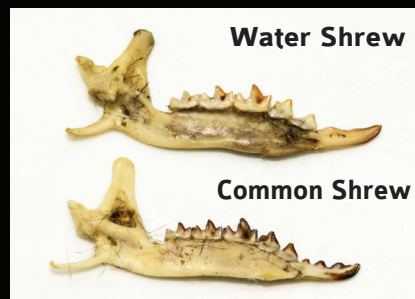
OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS, volunteers have been gathering at the Margrove Heritage Centre to practise some forensic pathology skills. Watching a lot of crime dramas wasn't going to be of much use here, however, as these volunteers have been helping identify the small mammal species found in barn owl pellets (from the remains of skulls and teeth) as part of our 'Nest Box Network Project'. This project, funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund and Northumbrian Water's 'Branch Out Fund', is using the analysis of pellets collected from nest box and roost sites to improve our knowledge of East Cleveland barn owl diet, as well as gaining a better understanding of the distribution of some of our lesser recorded small mammal species, such as the house mouse and the harvest mouse.



Wood Mouse



Field Vole



Water Shrew

Common Shrew





The barn owl is such a beautiful addition to the landscape that many landowners are keen to put up a nest box for them, but it is essential that new nest sites are also supported with a natural supply of food for growing owlets.

Barn owls prey predominantly on small mammals: mice, voles and shrews. They swallow them whole and quietly digest them. After a while, they cough out the indigestible remains including fur, bone and teeth as an owl pellet. Within these pellets are the skulls and bones of small mammals and birds, as well as other interesting finds, like the remains of dragonflies and beetles.

Our volunteers are working through owl pellets collected at various locations across East Cleveland to determine what our barn owls have been eating. They separate the skulls and other remains from a dark matrix of fur and begin their identification work - and with small mammals, it's all to do with the dentition. There is much looking through hand lenses and pulling of teeth to work out which species and the species numbers present at each site.

Did you know mice and rats have knobbly teeth, voles have teeth in zig-zags and shrew teeth are red? To tell the different species of mice and voles the volunteers pull a tooth and looked at tooth sockets and the tooth roots. For shrews it's a little more tricky and is based on the cusps on the end tooth.

"I love it", said volunteer Judith Powell. "You just don't know what you will find in each pellet and it is rewarding seeing the results develop as we go along."

The volunteers will hopefully work through pellets over a series of years to determine whether there are variations in diet and to help build a more comprehensive picture of the distribution of our smaller mammals. We'll report more results when we have them, so stay tuned!



It was a bit gruesome at first, but once I got into it, I was fascinated! It feels like doing an autopsy and you get so absorbed in the detail of all the little bones - not just the skulls (from which we could identify the species), but others too, like tiny rib bones and vertebrae. Small but perfectly formed - totally amazing!

SKILLS

Jen Hagan, Tees Valley Development Manager, tells us how, as one door closes, another has opened for our Life Skills project.



REGULAR READERS WILL KNOW we are big champions of nature for health and wellbeing and have reported on several projects over the years that improved the lives of many people with poor mental health, long-term physical conditions, learning disabilities, loneliness or recovering from addiction. We have many successes in bringing our projects to the people who need them, but more than this, we measure our success by whether we have given people *what* they need and not simply patting ourselves on the back for delivering our best intentions. And having delivered something that works we are committed to measuring our ongoing effectiveness, changing where we need to and ensuring that we can continue to deliver these services for the long-term.

Life Skills, launched in 2015 and funded by the Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund, was based on a lot of evidence we had collected about what worked to increase people's confidence, independence, self-esteem and relationships, through nature. Over the past 3 years we have completely smashed our targets for this project, working with 145 people who achieved 104 volunteering certificates and 63 John Muir conser-

vation awards; taking part in 223 sessions of nature reserve management, green woodwork, blacksmithing, wildlife gardening, dry stone walling and bushcraft. The findings from our unique '*nature and wellbeing assessment*' showed that, after just 12 weeks, people felt fitter, more able to make good decisions, more connected to their communities and had a more positive outlook. We found that not only were we working with those who needed this project the most, but they improved their overall wellbeing by 10% in 12 weeks. We have been lucky enough to work with many new partners, as well, allowing us to reach new people: Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind, Steps Disability Support and local NHS Foundation Trust facilities, to name a few.

These outcomes are in no small part thanks to the work of amazing people like Mat, Dan and Amy, here at the Trust, who have helped people facing all kinds of challenges above and beyond what was expected. *[Editors Note: and Jenny herself, who wrote this article, but is too modest to recognise the work she has done to plan the projects, generate both the research and most of the fundraising; as well as being wholly committed to the ideals of inclusivity and outreach, which has driven the Trust to succeed in our aims to really make a difference to health and wellbeing in our area and beyond.]*





It is fair to say that Life Skills has been a roaring success, but when the funding was due to end in June 2018, we had that familiar feeling of 'well, what now?' Individuals wanted to continue working with us, organisations wanted the same, but our original plans to fund the project after this through NHS money were, as you might already guess from media coverage of the NHS's own money troubles, growing less and less likely by the day.

Big Lottery, though, is a forward-thinking funder and we are a forward-thinking charity. At the beginning of the year we had open and honest conversations with them, during which we demonstrated how Life Skills had truly become a 'people-led' project, that we had proved was both wanted and needed. They heard us and suggested we apply for funding to continue.

Life Skills developed from something that was 100% for people, to also being by people and the Big Lottery could see this and valued it enough to offer us funding for another 3 years. 132 people (at least) will now get the opportunity to find whatever it is that connects them to nature and improves the way they feel. Furthermore, thousands of people across Teesside will benefit from the work these volunteers do on our

nature reserves and green places. It should never be forgotten that the impacts of nature and of giving in the community are felt in everything from the quality of the air we breathe to how safe we feel and how we deal with the stresses and strains of daily life.

We have already made improvements and we will trial changes to how we deliver Life Skills in the future, but the main difference is that we need to get the word out to help everyone recognise the importance of services like this in every aspect of our lives. Life Skills is not a project for people that tick a box or fall into a category or even just for those who are 'unwell': it is for all of us to use, to appreciate and to inspire us to talk about our amazing Tees Valley wildlife as much as it deserves.

Over the next 3 years we will be taking every opportunity to present our work to anyone with the ability to support it beyond 2021, we will be encouraging everyone to talk about the benefits to friends, family, employers, on social media, to their GP's and MP's. If you feel you can help or you know someone who could benefit from Life Skills, please have a look on our website for more details or contact me at the Trust, via details at the front of this magazine. I look forward to hearing from you!



Sue Antrobus, Tees Valley Wild Green Places Manager, tells us about what a successful summer it has been for the Sammy the Rainbow Snail family wildlife roadshow!



Summer with Sammy the Rainbow Snail

OVER THE 2018 SUMMER HOLIDAYS Sammy the Snail visited 11 green sites across the Tees Valley, engaging 1,743 people, thanks to the help of nine "Friends of" groups and the input of 46 volunteers and three apprentices.

These events provided opportunities for families to visit and enjoy their local green space, take part in fun activities to learn about snails and other mini-

beasts, as well meeting the volunteers from the groups who care for these green gems.

Children were fascinated with our friendly snails and learning about how snails move, see, taste and smell their surroundings. Coming into close contact with our two pet African land snails (Bill and Ben) was especially popular. All the children were extremely gentle and caring when handling our slimy friends.



Our apprentice, Zannah, expertly bringing Sammy the snail to life for children visiting the roadshows.

The highlight of each day was a visit from Sammy the Rainbow Snail. Lots of families took selfies of themselves and their children with this exceedingly rare gastropod!

Our 3D model snail was a great hit too; we were all amazed by how complex their internal anatomy was, and how their stomach was coiled inside their shell. But where is the brain, we all asked?

Questions like these formed part of the snail quiz, which proved to be a challenge for all ages and a great way to learn. The most popular facts were that snails have a rough tongue, called a radula, which





Families visiting the roadshows got in touch with their creativity by fashioning colourful snails from all kinds of materials.

looks something like a file with rows of thousands of tiny teeth called denticles. We also learned that they don't have a brain like we do, but rather a series of ganglia (like carrier bags filled with neurons) that control different parts of their whole nervous system.

Our visiting families enjoyed getting creative, making colourful snails from loo rolls and modelling clay. The snail finger puppets, badges and book marks were also popular. There was a hunt the snail game and younger children pretended to be song thrushes and were given a beak (plastic tweezers) with which to hunt for laminated paper snails. They found the colourful rainbow snails much easier to find than green and brown ones. The children quickly worked out that if you were a snail, being camouflaged would help you escape the beady eyes of predators.

Older children and adults puzzled over our 'Is it a Mollusc challenge?'. It's amazing that as well as slugs and snails, that cuttlefish, squid and octopus are also molluscs.

Mini-beast hunting was as popular as ever!

Our humorous leaflet "How to protect your prize plants from chomping snails and slugs, whilst still being a nice person", was appreciated by gardeners and formed part of our take home pack. You can try the quiz and find all our other information online at: www.tvgreenplaces.co.uk/2018/09/a-wonderful-sunny-summer-with-sammy-the-rainbow-snail/

At about 4.5 inches, fully extended, our African snails were a BIG hit with visitors. Here you can see Bill....no Ben....no, er, one of our snails showing he's not afraid of anyone.



Photo credit: David Sanderson



THE PERFECT GIFT FOR THOSE WHO LIKE TO....

- ~ ESCAPE THE STRESSES AND STRAINS OF MODERN LIFE ~
- ~ LOOK FOR ADVENTURES IN NEW AND EXCITING PLACES ~
- ~ LEARN ABOUT THE NATURAL WORLD AROUND THEM ~
- ~ CARE FOR THEIR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT ~

If this sounds like someone you know (or you want to drop a hint for your own Christmas present), try Tees Valley Wildlife Trust Membership from just £12 per year!



To find out about our offers & get your gift in time for Christmas 2018, please place your orders by 12 noon on Monday 7th December! You can call us on: 01287 636382 or e-mail info@teeswildlife.org