

Protecting Wildlife for the Future

WILDT EES

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MAGAZINE



**Get to know
these masters of
the wide oceans
through our
'Wilder Coast'
project.**

Issue No. 28



Welcome

www.teeswildlife.org

Welcome to this issue of Wild Tees

Dear Reader,

In the time since our last issue, floods and forest fires have scarcely been out of the news. Climate change is challenging us all (as you can read in these pages) and a global response is critical at this time. Among many initiatives, the Wildlife Trusts have responded with our 'Wilder Manifesto', which recognises the link between the climate emergency and the ecological one, but we are also an optimistic bunch and realise that we can offer solutions to the predicament in which we find ourselves.

One such solution we have been hearing about is to plant more trees, but there are many others. Everyone knows that trees are highly effective carbon stores, drawing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and turning it into the building blocks for their roots, trunks and branches. Few people, however, realise that grasslands also store carbon dioxide, and they are particularly effective when the grassland is rich in plant diversity.

A number of our nature reserves are made up of species-rich grassland; from Gravel Hole in Norton, to Maze Park in Middlesbrough and Cattersty Gill in East Cleveland. Not only are these reserves contributing to a wider network of carbon dioxide absorbing grasslands, they provide habitat for wildlife including many invertebrates which play a valuable role as pollinators and which appear to be particularly vulnerable to climate change.

Researchers in California are getting very interested in grasslands because they sequester most of their carbon underground in the soil, while forests store it mostly in woody biomass and leaves. If a forest burns, much of the carbon is returned to the atmosphere, but when a grassland catches fire the carbon stores are protected. This is not to say that we should replace our woods with grasslands, but we really should recognise the valuable role they are playing to protect us and the planet.

Combined, our grassland nature reserves cover over 95 hectares of land, capable of locking away around 11,000 tonnes of carbon!

Jeremy Garside, Chief Executive

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SUN, SURF & SUNCREAM

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water, Reserves Manager, **Dan van den Toorn**, explores the real cost of saving your skin.

WHETHER YOU CHOOSE TO ESCAPE the winter gloom or simply make the most of our increasing spring and summer temperatures, taking a trip to the beach is undoubtedly one of our nation's favourite ways to get a healthy dose of nature. Indeed, one of the surest signs we are actually aware of the changing climate is our acceptance of the skin cancer awareness message that nowadays we all need to cover up and slap on the SPF (Sun Protection Factor).

And we are not alone. Predictions suggest that by 2024, the global sun-care market will be worth a staggering £19.6 billion! It's big business, but isn't it protecting us from real, life ending, forms of cancer? Well - yes and no! Sunburn

can impact long-term skin health, but current research is pointing to healthy, daily, doses of sun exposure (without sun-block) actually being very beneficial for all sorts of human biological systems - everything from blood pressure to mental health - many of which cost far more in welfare expenses and lives lost or curtailed than skin cancer alone.

The pros vs. cons of sun exposure is worth an article on its own (keep an eye out in the summer issue), but for now I can say it's a balancing act: so long as there remains insufficient general understanding of sun exposure, it will be hard to break the grip of big business on our approach to skin health. And given that many of us will still want to protect ourselves from the dreaded sun-burn (my fair-skinned self included), we are likely to be reaching for one of hundreds of brands of suncream, just to be on the safe side. But (yes, another but) do you

give a thought to how much of that SPF ends up in the world's oceans - and what effect this can have?

Until recently, I too would have answered 'no' to that one. But for over a decade now there has been growing evidence of

the damage SPF's are wreaking on marine life. It's estimated that over 14,000 tons of sunscreen washes off our bodies into the world's oceans every year. But it's also the potency of the toxic elements that cause widespread harm. A 2016 study published in the *Archives of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology* found that one drop of oxybenzone (linked with octinoxate

**14,000
TONNES OF
SUNSCREEN
ENTER THE OCEAN
EVERY YEAR**



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and octocrylene as the three main hazardous components of suncreams and sprays) in 4.3 million gallons of water, is enough to bleach all the coral it comes into contact with - such a concern that the islands of Hawaii, as well as parts of Mexico, Florida and the Caribbean, have banned the use of SPF's containing these three chemicals on their beaches.

Even in the UK, we should take heed. Not only are the three most harmful ingredients capable of destroying the algae that bring life to coral reefs, but they also create hormonal changes in fish, reducing male characteristics and impacting fertility (you might remember an article in issue 24 of this magazine explaining the similar effects of the contraceptive pill entering our water courses!). Even if you don't go into the water, washing off the remains of suncream after a day in the sun can

still release elements into the watercourses and from there into the sea. Oxybenzone can even be found in your pee for up to three days after application (something to think about if you're at all concerned about what you put in your body).

So what's the answer? Well, in the same way you might eschew cosmetic products containing parabens, sodium lauryl and laureth sulphate, DEA's, MEA's and benzophenones, there are a growing number of brands that are working hard to supply 'ocean-friendly' SPF's (though be cautious looking for this term alone as it's currently unregulated). Better still, check that your SPF is oxybenzone, octinoxate and octocrylene free. Do a search online or ask at your pharmacy - products range from £10 to over £50, depending on how seriously you take your skin-care regime!



The Ocean Agency
/XL Catlin Seaview
Survey / Richard
Vevers



SEEKING VOLUNTEERS TO SURVEY TEESSIDE'S WILDER COAST!

**Did
you
know?**

Whales,
dolphins and
porpoises are

regularly seen off
the north east coast?

While we hear of local sightings
of cetaceans from many people,
our own stretch of coast has not
been surveyed in a regular,
scientific way.

Tees
Valley
Wildlife
Trust's Wilder
Coast Project is
hoping to help plug
this gap! We would
like to recruit some
citizen scientists to carry
out regular surveys from specific
points on the Teesside coast.

If you enjoy taking regular trips
to enjoy the Teesside coastline,
why not use some of that time
to record what you see (and
what you don't, which is just as
important to us)?

Why do we need to survey?

Whales, dolphins and porpoises face many serious threats from human activities: getting tangled in fishing gear, climate change, being hit by ships, consuming marine pollution, noise pollution, and their environment being damaged.

We need to understand more about them so that we can campaign for appropriate measures to safeguard these beautiful creatures. We would like to find out which species come to Teesmouth, where are they going and how do they use particular areas?

If you would like to get involved or find out more, please ring 01287 636382 or e-mail our Wilder Coast Officer, Jacky Watson, on: education@teeswildlife.org

**NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY - JUST ENTHUSIASM,
PATIENCE...OH, AND A PAIR OF BINOCULARS!**

Environment Agency Community Engagement – Flood Resilience



Community Engagement Officer for Cleveland, **Sarah Duffy**, works with school and youth groups, community groups and businesses, to support them in learning more about local flood risk, and how to be prepared.

FOLLOWING ON FROM THE DEVASTATING FLOODS OF 2019, affecting Yorkshire and many other parts of the UK, it is more important than ever to ensure that communities are prepared to respond to flooding. In the last few years, we have witnessed the impacts that flooding brings locally and around the world, and it is our hope that we can work with communities to build up resilience so that people can respond to flooding safely and quickly, and get back to normal sooner.

Funded by the Northumbria Regional Flood and Coast Committee, the community engagement project started in June 2017 and doesn't just cover Cleveland. The project stretches across the whole of the North East and has gone from strength to strength, so far working with over 17,000 school and youth groups, developing 10 new community flood plans, and supporting the setting-up of over 20 new flood groups.

If you would like more information, or to book youth or school sessions please get in touch with Sarah Duffy: sarah.duffy@environment-agency.gov.uk

Some simple tips might include:

1. Checking flood risk online at www.gov.uk/check-flood-risk
2. Sign up to flood warnings at www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings
3. Make a home action plan so the whole family knows what to do - just like you would for a fire!
4. If you are in a flood risk area, make a grab bag – include a torch, battery's, phone charger, important documents and any important medicine!
5. Set up a community flood group in your local area!

The Wildlife Trusts believe that government should also invest in wilder landscapes which could provide the natural solutions to help prevent flooding in future. Habitats such as upland bogs and moors, woodlands, wetlands and species-rich grasslands act as giant sponges, absorbing and holding water and slowing down water run-off into rivers. At Tees Valley Wildlife Trust we also work on large-scale habitat restoration schemes which slow down the transit of water into our rivers and streams and help mitigate flood damage to surrounding land.



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// WE ARE IN THE BEGINNING OF A MASS EXTINCTION, AND ALL YOU CAN TALK ABOUT IS MONEY AND FAIRY TALES OF ETERNAL ECONOMIC GROWTH. //

Reserves Manager, **Dan van den Toorn**, investigates the global Youth Activism movement and what it can teach us if we listen.

THESE ARE THE WORDS OF ONE YOUNG WOMAN, Greta Thunberg, who has come to symbolise the environmental youth movement (so much so that, among other awards, she was recently voted Time Magazine's 'Person of the Year') - her implacable nature and impassioned delivery eliciting so many emotions (good and bad) in so many people.

I freely admit that viewing an internet clip of her speaking in front of heads of state in the U.N. General Assembly (from which the title quote is extracted) was a hard watch. We are so used to politicians mollifying us with contrived, self-empowering speeches, that to hear a young person pleading for their future - with the absolute conviction of her argument, without artifice and holding nothing back - is both electrifying and jarring to many of us.

But a big part of what makes her sometimes uncomfortable to watch is the language and tone of her message, which is often (though not exclusively) withering in its apportioning of guilt and shame on those she sees as paying lip service to the environmental effort. Speaking in the forum of global democracy allows her to say these things; living in that world allows us to say those things too - and we should, whenever we think decision makers are not acting in our best interests. Regardless of the language of activism and, to a certain extent, regardless of your interpretation of the scientific evidence, young activists are increasing the volume of the message: to create a cleaner, greener and more habitable world for us and all living things. A good thing, I say!

Although Youth Activism is not a new thing, the ability of social media to generate a ground-swell of popular opinion, has allowed many young people to focus their determination into global cultural movements - whether it's young Americans campaigning for tighter gun control in the wake of school shootings, student protests in Hong Kong over government control or the work of people like Malala Yousafzai to promote rights for female education in Pakistan.

With social media giving more power to those who might otherwise not be heard, it is unsurprising that young people are finding a voice on the matters that concern them. And not just a voice, but increasingly a level of influence, in places where decisions are being made that affect all of us. For this, and many other reasons, I don't think we can or should ignore their efforts or diminish their right to take on the adult world and shape it how they want, rather than simply inherit what we leave for them.

While Greta Thunberg might be a household name, she is just one of over a million pupils from schools across more than 100 countries, protesting for action against climate change. In the UK, more than 10,000 young activists abandoned their schools and took to the streets in February last year to join 60 different protests nation-wide; and the movement has continued to grow since then.

There is outrage from some commentators who say children would be better off staying in school, getting a complete education and learning the skills needed to save the world. But you could also say that the young



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Greta Thunberg outside Swedish Parliament, by Anders Helberg



ABOVE: Greta Thunberg making a stand for her future outside the Swedish Parliament - none of us know what a difference one act will make!

people involved in activism are just the type to succeed in life, showing already a commitment to an idea and the skills to take action (some young activists have coordinated demonstrations and massive events with no help from adults - I couldn't do that, could you?). In response, the activists themselves point out that by the time they are in a position to create a substantive solution, there will be too little time to use it.

As Miss Thunberg said to the American Joint House of Representatives in September last year (alongside fellow young climate activists, Jamie Margolin, Vic Barrett and Benji Backer), *'I don't want you to listen to me, I want you to listen to the scientists....I want you to unite behind the science and I want you to take real action.'* The main response from all sides on the adult panel facing them, was to pay lip-service to the stand they were taking, while offering **no real action** - the platitudes and the sometimes defensive stance from the politicians was something Miss Thunberg later commented was wasting valuable time: people fighting for change don't want a pat on the back, they want **change**.

Some political detractors of the climate movement disagree with the science, some don't believe it and others just don't understand it. But for most of us, the over-riding feeling is one of it being too late and feeling there are too many systemic issues standing in the way of making a difference (the cost of electric vehicles is too high for many, the cost of ethical choices in shops is too high for many, the cost of improving the energy efficiency of our homes is too high for many, for some even the amount of effort to maintain a wildlife friendly garden is too high! And it is *'the many'* who we need to take up these changes).

Whatever your argument might be, there is one point which should cut through all of it, both for the consumer, the supplier and the policy maker - a green economy is the only future we have! Our systems are old, damaging, out-dated and inefficient - this costs us all more money (higher food prices, higher household rates, higher prices at the fuel pumps). Young people see the nonsense of continuing to believe the myth perpetuated by 'carbon-capitalists' and they want politicians and businesspeople to realise that the sooner they invest in alternative infrastructure and technologies, the more we will all profit from healthy, sustainable growth. Better that than the panic-fire alternative of acting with some last futile gesture of wishful thinking.

But it can be a bitter pill for adults to swallow. As you have read or seen for yourselves, some of the rhetoric

BELOW: The movement sweeps the globe.



Image above: Kids Want Climate Justice by Lorie Shaull, Washington, United States (Wikimedia)



from Youth Activists is withering in the extreme - failure, fiddling while the world burns, denial - all these accusations have been levelled at those in power (and, implicitly, at the rest of us). All these accusations in many ways are true. As a species we have not done nothing, but as individuals we simply haven't done enough. Like it or not, the science is telling us we are fast approaching a tipping point and running out of time to make the changes necessary. Ask the people flooded out of their homes in Fishlake or the thousands burned out by the Australian wildfires (still raging at the time of writing) - they'll probably tell you how badly they wish something had been done sooner. These are not isolated events, this is not bad luck - we all kicked open the flood-gates; we all lit the match!

Am I bringing you down with doom and gloom? Undoubtedly there are tough choices ahead. But I can say that environmental activists don't want to sow the seeds of depression or anxiety (there's enough of that already - particularly in our children!). We don't want you to give up because it's all too big to handle. We want you to feel galvanised. We want you to realise that you are the change. We want you to realise the hope that is generated by knowing we need to act, rather than being stuck in the happy 'burn it all' ignorance of the 1980's.

If you're already doing what you can, then help someone who isn't. Pass on what you have learned. Buy them a gift that might make them think of swapping to a sustainable alternative. Show them how they can influence the producers they buy from. Show them how badly you need their help in all this. The aggregated power of small individual actions is the only way to move us off the path to destruction in time. You don't have to save the world, just your little bit of it. We need to do it now. Involve your young people or heed their concerns. Take back control, pass on the message, be an activist in any way you can!

HARTLEPOOL SCHOOL SCOOPS 30 DAYS WILD PRIZE

LAST YEAR, as part of the Trust's mass participation project: #30DaysWild - doing Random Acts of Wildness every day in June, we worked with a number of schools delivering 30DaysWild assemblies and guiding pupils in activities like bug hunting, bird box making and planting wildflower seeds. We left behind resources to help them do something wild every school day and Wild Homework at weekends!

The schools recorded their wild activities on a wall chart and these were entered into a competition sponsored by Thirteen, a local housing organisation, who also promoted 30DaysWild to their staff and customers. Winners were reception class of St. Aidan's Church Of England Memorial Primary School in Hartlepool. Teacher Joanne Purvis said, *"Our pupils enjoyed using simple, natural, materials in creative ways. They loved watching mini-beasts that crawled into our 'bug hotel' while learning to be more aware of the natural world."*

John Woods, Environmental Specialist with Thirteen said, *"We're very happy to support #30DaysWild. It's a very positive project which enhances people's views and ideas, while getting involved with nature to offer it a helping hand."*

Connecting with nature every day for a month has been shown to have great benefits on health and wellbeing. #30DaysWild returns on June 1st 2020, so keep your eyes open for advanced publicity and get signed up for a really wild time!





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East Cleveland Heritage Officer, **Kate Bartram**, has been seeing things differently.



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SENSE THE WORLD

Connecting visually impaired people to nature

THE TEES VALLEY WILDLIFE TRUST, has joined with Friends Groups across the Tees Valley, to support an innovative project led by Going for Independence CIC. Together we have been creating opportunities for groups of blind and visually impaired people to learn about and experience the natural heritage to be found in their local green spaces.

Engaging with visually impaired groups from Redcar, Darlington, Stockton and Hartlepool, the project used sensory stimuli to discover the seasonal changes in nature. Props and materials from our collections and the surrounding countryside were used in a series of workshops. Participants listened to bird and animal calls, tasted seasonal fruits and products (including sloe gin!), smelled the scents of seasonal flowers and fruits and handled a range of different items such as skulls, grasses, wild flowers, feathers, cones, seeds and nests.

Have you ever considered how a person blind from birth might imagine a bat, a badger or an otter? We provided our taxidermy collection for them to get up close to these animals and help them build a picture of the natural world around them. These lively workshops provoked lots of discussions, evoked many memories and were really rewarding and informative for everyone involved.

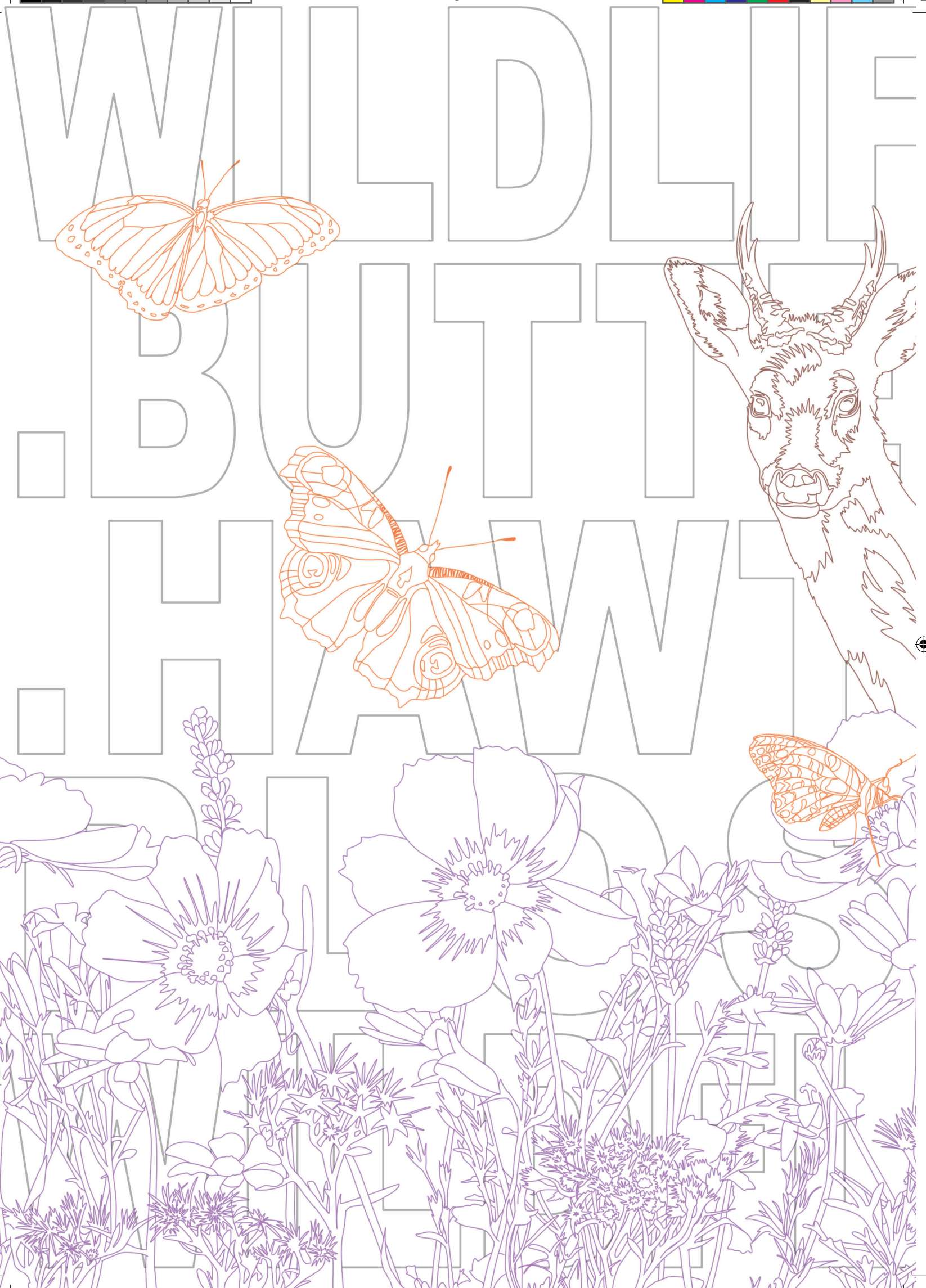
Each seasonal workshop was followed up by a nature walk for the visually impaired group in their local green space. The aim was to give people greater confidence to go outside and visit these places. Fantastic support was provided by Friends Groups and other volunteers: Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery, Middlesbrough; Friends of Ward Jackson Park, Hartlepool; Friends of South Park, Darlington; and Friends of Errington Woods, New Marske. The Friends Groups received training in guiding as part of the project. As volunteers they have all helped guide visually impaired people and shared their knowledge and enthusiasm for the nature and heritage of their local green spaces, hopefully building lasting relationships and a greater understanding of a natural world, accessible for all.

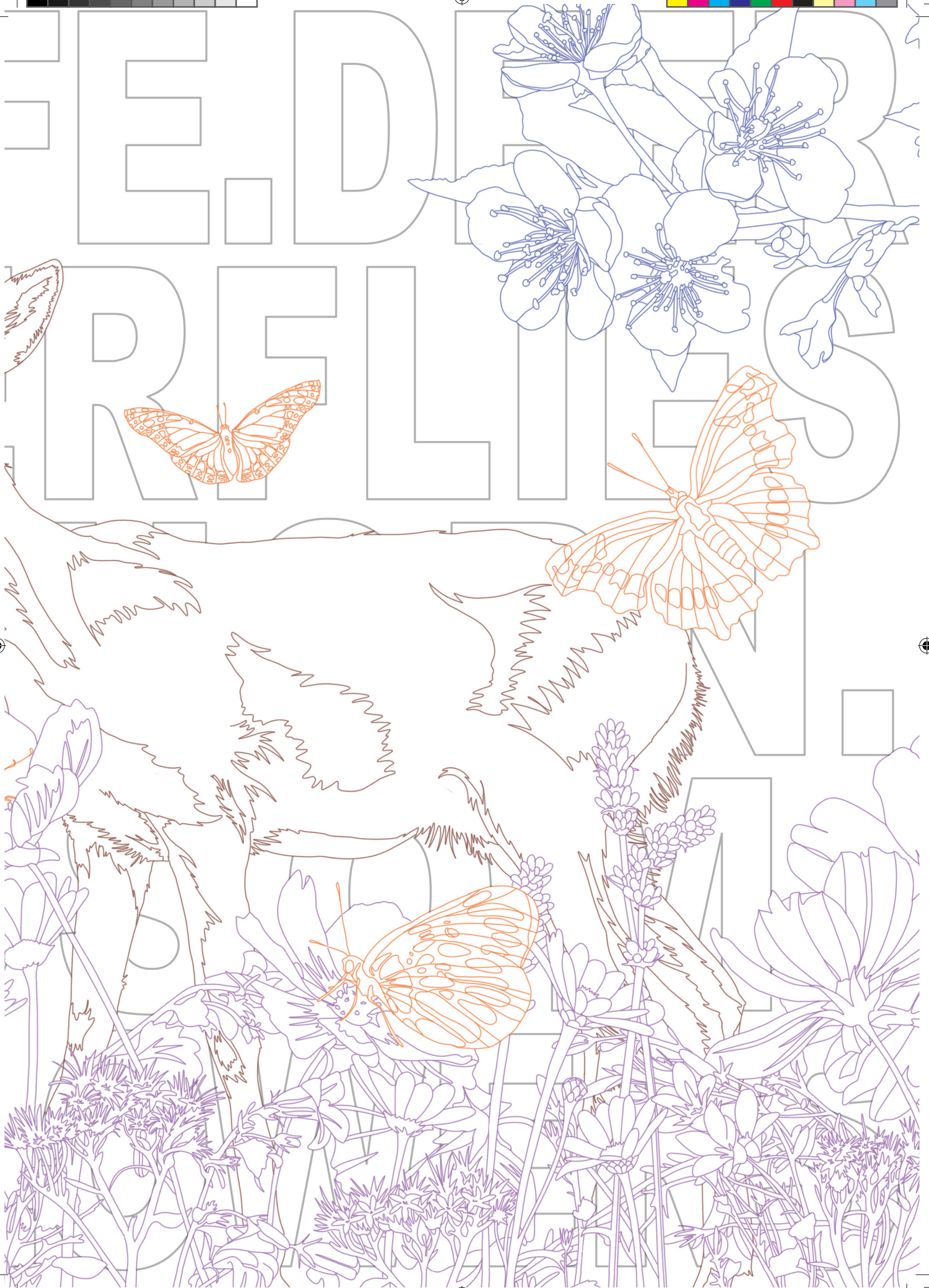
Pam Bennett. Managing Director at Going For Independence CIC, had this to say...

"This is proving to be a wonderful project with so many benefits for participants, from being supported to go outside safely in the fresh air, accessing nature and wildlife, making new friends and learning about the heritage in their local green places. There will be good memories for us all, as well as making a difference for people who are often isolated at home because of their sight loss."

This project is funded by National lottery players and delivered through the National Lottery Heritage Fund.







STARTING AN UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT

Mole Catcher, **Jeff Nicholls**, wants government support for better animal welfare standards in his industry. Here's why.

I'M A MOLE CATCHER. A very old profession and one which, in the 1700's, saw a mole catcher in every parish in the country. Back then we were numerous and so in demand we warranted better pay than surgeons. Now there are far fewer and definitely not so well paid! In contrast, there are just over 41 million moles in Great Britain and, while they are not a protected or threatened species, they are something of a British icon.

For many of you reading this, I expect you will wish my job wasn't necessary. That to take the lives of moles simply because they are a nuisance is unjustified. And yet others might agree that there are good reasons for controlling moles where they cause damage to land and harm to livestock (such as contamination of silage by molehills and their soil-dwelling bacteria). Farmers and private landowners (lovers of the British lawn) are my main clients, but the nations' mole catchers are employed in a wide variety of situations: maintaining golf courses, racecourses, football pitches and estate grounds, to

name a few. I make no apology for my work, but I am very conscious of the distress it causes these wonderful and ancient British mammals, who have been turning the soil of this country for over 350,000 years.

My contention is that current welfare standards in the mole-catching industry are not sufficiently rigorous to protect moles from undue suffering, and I've made it my life's work to try and change that fact. My concerns are not purely emotional, they are born out of a great many hours studying moles and the varying effectiveness of mole traps. The conclusion of this work is that there is no such thing as an instant kill trap, no matter the claims made by retailers and, indeed, some professionals. While distasteful, an instant kill would be much preferred to the lingering death many practitioners inflict on their quarry. My simple answer to this state of affairs, something I have lobbied for for some time, is a small change in existing legislation - that practitioners *must* (rather than the current '*should*' - Natural England's stipulation) check traps at least once a day. This would greatly improve

Mole source image: juefraphoto - shutterstock



welfare standards across the country.

For centuries (ceramic mole traps have been found from Roman times) this humble British mammal has been subjected to all manner of attacks: from drowning to fumigation, poisons (Strychnine was used until its ban in 2006, enacted for the great harm it could do to other wildlife) to mechanical snares, as well as all kinds of ineffective home-made repellents, like putting moth balls or holly branches down the holes.

The only remaining legitimate control options are mechanical traps, of which there are numerous types, none currently approved by DEFRA (Department of Food and Rural Affairs). These hold the mole until an inspection is made, when they can be despatched (preferably by a professional). Once caught, the mole is gripped until its last breath, which normally comes as a result of exhaustion, dehydration or starvation...not the words you want to read in an article in a wildlife magazine! But the truth should be known and used to help the mole to a better future and a higher level of welfare.

'So what about live traps', I hear you say? I say that catching a mole alive and relocating it is perhaps the most inhumane thing that you could do. We live in more aware times, but while live capture traps might look like the humane answer to the troublesome mole, really they are for our benefit rather than the mole - who is in for a very stressful time, trapped for who knows how long and, in many cases, dying (despite our best efforts) from susceptibility to shock, hypothermia and dehydration.

This doesn't even address what you do with the mole should you find it alive. The mole is a fiercely territorial animal and will live a solitary existence outside the mating period. Fights to the death are not uncommon between competitors in the same territory (which can be several thousand square metres in size) and moles must consume nearly two-thirds their own body-weight per day, so are often on the move. A relocation site would need to be free of other moles, predators and with sufficient food resources - but without great research, how would you know where is best and how many the land could accommodate?

In light of this, Natural England advise that any mole caught alive should be humanely despatched. I do this for a living and I believe that I provide the best level of mole welfare currently available. How I achieve this is to inspect my devices a minimum of once a day. To many this seems an unreasonable (and unprofitable) requirement. Often devices are left for days, even weeks between inspections, with many repeating the mantra that it's not required because the traps kill the mole instantly. As I have said, this is not the case and knowing it should be reason enough to inspect for possible suffering.

Of course, I accept that Inspection of any device, even once a day, will not remove all suffering, but I believe it is a minimum effort that is warranted and achievable. There are many reasons why you should inspect a device for capture of a mole once a day, there are none I can see not too. So much of this suffering could be eased with one simple sentence that I'd like to see enacted in law:

'Any person that places any mechanical device for the control of a mole, has a personal responsibility to inspect it for unnecessary suffering a minimum of once per day'.

I believe that while the industry exists, it should follow this reasonable stipulation for the humane treatment of the animals we control. If ever it is deemed there is no further need for the control of moles, I shall happily be the first to hang up my traps, comforted by the knowledge that I did everything I could for the welfare of the animal that has given me my living.

If DEFRA compel this simple legislative change, it will make a huge difference and have an immediate effect upon the welfare for moles in the United Kingdom. I need your help in driving through this small but important change in the law. If you can, please contact one of the national bodies I have mentioned (Natural England, DEFRA - or your local member of parliament) and lend your support to the above statement. We get so much good from our wonderful wildlife, seen and unseen, the least we can do is to act compassionately and responsibly when removing them for our own benefit.

YOUR GUIDE TO MARINE MAMMALS IN THE NORTH SEA

Wilder Coast Team volunteer and marine biologist, **Ashleigh Carter**, has compiled this beginners' guide to the identification of marine mammals you might spot along our North East coastline.



Harbour Seals Vs. Grey Seals

You may spot seals hauled out on many of our sandy beaches, where they rest and give birth ... but which seals are they?

The two most common species found around UK coastlines are grey seals and harbour (common) seals. A harbour seal, when born, will look exactly like its mother, only smaller. The pup will be brown in colour and its fur will be waterproof, meaning it can swim from the first day. A grey seal pup, however, will be born with thick white fur, which is not waterproof and means it is unable to swim and must wait approximately 3 weeks before it gets its waterproof adult coat. To tell the difference between the adults, just look at the shape of their heads. Harbour seals have a smaller, circular head, while grey seals have a larger, oval or elongated head. Grey seals have, what's described as a 'Roman' nose, being quite flat compared to harbour seals, which are often said to have a dog-like face.

If you ever find a whale, dolphin, porpoise or seal that is injured or distressed, please call the British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) on 01825765546. These are trained volunteers who can provide first aid and have equipment ready to refloat small whales, dolphins and porpoises; they have the equipment to transport sick seals to rescue centres.



Porpoises

Only one species of porpoise is found in the North Sea: the harbour porpoise. As its name suggests, it lives in shallow coastal waters and is commonly found just beyond harbours. The harbour porpoise can be very difficult to identify as it is a shy animal. Where dolphins may enjoy and seek out boat interaction, harbour porpoise will usually avoid it. Being small (approx 1 – 2m) and dark in colour makes them hard to spot. One characteristic is their dorsal fin, which forms a small triangle halfway along its back. They live off our coast all year, but the best time to spot them is on a calm day when the sea is flat.

Marine mammals breath air, like all mammals, but you might be surprised how long they can go without it:

Grey seals 5-10 minutes

Minke Whales, dolphins and porpoises 10 - 20 minutes

Sperm whales 1 hour 30 minutes

Cuvier's beaked whale broke the record at 2 hours 30 minutes!



Which dolphin was that?

Four main species of dolphin can be found off the north-east coast. These are bottlenose, common, Risso's and white-beaked dolphin. Dolphins are larger than porpoises and usually easier to spot as they are playful and social animals.

Bottlenose dolphins are a uniform grey/blue colour which is paler underneath. They can grow up to 4m in length and have a distinctive crescent shaped dorsal fin. They also have a short 'bottle-shaped' nose and a distinctive crease between the eye and beak.

Common dolphins are easily identifiable with a yellow and white figure-of-eight along their flank - yellow towards the head, white towards the tail. The dorsal fin is black/grey in colour. Unlike the bottlenose, they have long slim beaks and are typically smaller at about 1.5 - 2.5m.

Risso's dolphins have a very distinctive round, melon-shaped, head and they don't have a beak, like the Bottlenose or Common dolphin. Instead their head and beak merge together. They are black/grey in colour, but as they age they get lighter, usually with white scarring along the body. They grow to approx 3.5m.

White-beaked dolphins are typically black/ grey with a white underside, beak and saddle patch (just behind the dorsal fin). They have very short stubby beaks and they typically grow to about 3m.

5 COMMON DOLPHIN



6 RISSE'S DOLPHIN



7 WHITE-BEAKED DOLPHIN



8 HUMPBACK WHALE



9



MINKE WHALE

10



SPERM WHALE

Whales

There are two distinctive types of whale: toothed whales and baleen whales. Toothed whales (e.g. sperm whales) have a row of teeth so they can rip and shred prey like squid and fish. Baleen whales have long fibres of baleen, which are used to sieve out prey such as crustaceans or small fish.

Minke Whales are the most common whale species found in the North Sea. They are baleen whales and have rorqual pleats under their lower jaw, which expand to increase the volume of water they can sift for food. They grow to approx 9m in length and have a distinctive large, triangular-shaped head. They have white patches on pectoral fins and their dorsal fin is three-quarters of the way down their back. They are a pale blue/grey colour with a white underside.

Rarer species of whale found in the North Sea.

Humpback whales have a distinctive bumpy rostrum (nose), large oversized pectoral fins which are white on the underside and are thought to help with rounding up prey. They too are baleen whales and, like the Minke whale, have rorqual pleats under their lower jaw. They are black on the dorsal side and are white underneath. Their dorsal fin is located three-quarters down their back and is a swept back triangle shape. They grow to approx 18m.

Sperm whales are toothed whales, but only have teeth on their bottom jaw which is long and narrow. They have a large square shaped head, are grey in colour and their dorsal fin looks more like a hump than a fin. Sperm whales have a unique blow hole, which is far forward on the head and to the left making the blow spray shoot out at a 45 degree angle. Usually, the head of the sperm whale will be covered in white scarring from tackling suckers of giant squid. They grow to approximately 12m for females and 19m for males.

#6. RISSE'S DOLPHIN: Niki Clear #7. WHITE-BEAKED DOLPHIN: John Carnell (Northumbria Mammal Group_FRE)
#8. HUMPBACK: Christopher Michel #9. MINKE WHALE: Tom McDonnell #10. SPERM WHALE: Gabriel Barathieu

Swifts epitomise British summertime with their screaming flight. But as fewer of these miraculous birds return to our skies each year, **Sarah Gibson** reveals how we can help them

The secret lives of • Swifts



COMMON SWIFT: ROBIN CHITTENDEN/NATUREPL.COM

Swifts are not the quietest birds. Nor are they given to skulking in the undergrowth. They live their entire lives in the open air, scything past on crescent wings, often making piercing screeches. Yet, like many people, I never used to notice them.

There had been swallows nesting in a barn near my old home in the Welsh borders. I'd see them swooping over the stable door, beaks stuffed with insects for their chicks. Later, I'd watch the fledglings practise flying in the safety of the barn. When I moved to a nearby market town, I missed that closeness... until I discovered swifts.

There was a pair nesting in the eaves of the house next door. They would storm down the narrow gap between the buildings with a rush of wings, and perform a handbrake turn to enter their nest hole. Blink and you'd miss them. Sitting in the garden on fine, still evenings, I watched them gliding through the air, snapping up insects, until the light drained from the sky and the first bats emerged.

Life on the wing

Swifts are incredibly aerial birds, living entirely on the wing for years at a time, rarely touching ground for even a moment. They catch all their food in the

air: aphids, flies, spiders, beetles, moths; even dragonflies, whirled into the sky, carried on the wind. Swifts drink and bathe, sleep and even mate on the wing. They fly closer to the sun than any other bird, feeding and resting at altitude.

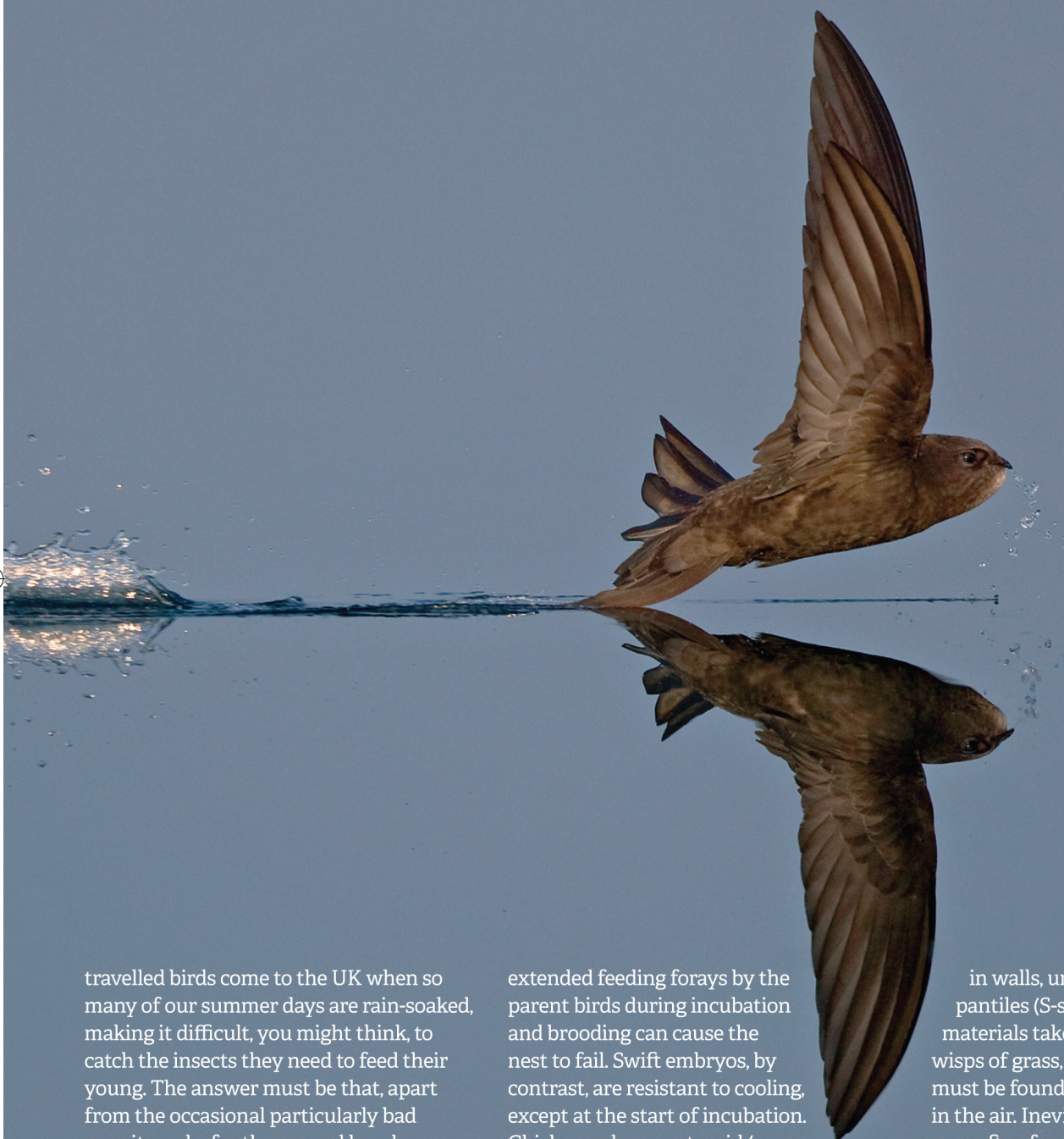
Swifts spend most of their lives in Africa, but they journey thousands of miles to breed in a vast swathe across the world, from the westernmost fringes of Europe, eastward to China. Around the globe there are estimated to be somewhere between 95 million and 165 million of them sailing across the skies, justifying their English name of 'common swift'.

You may wonder why these well-



Sarah Gibson

works for Shropshire Wildlife Trust. She's met swift experts across Europe, raises local awareness of the birds' plight and revels in the aerial skill of these awesome birds.



travelled birds come to the UK when so many of our summer days are rain-soaked, making it difficult, you might think, to catch the insects they need to feed their young. The answer must be that, apart from the occasional particularly bad year, it works for them – and has done for millions of years. In fact, our northern summers have a great advantage for swifts – long daylight hours, which allow them to forage for 16 hours a day at the season's peak.

Swifts have several unusual adaptations that enable them to cope with our bad weather. The eggs and chicks of most small birds are vulnerable to chilling, so

extended feeding forays by the parent birds during incubation and brooding can cause the nest to fail. Swift embryos, by contrast, are resistant to cooling, except at the start of incubation. Chicks can become torpid (a state of lowered metabolism) to conserve energy, enabling the parent birds to feed elsewhere, until the weather improves. Once they are a few weeks old and have fat reserves, swift chicks can survive several days without nourishment, greatly enhancing their chances of fledging in variable weather conditions.

Swifts make their nests in crevices

in walls, under roof eaves or inside pantiles (S-shaped roof tiles). Gathering materials takes time – all the feathers, wisps of grass, tree seeds and flower sepals must be found on the wing, blowing about in the air. Inevitably, scraps of plastic are now often found woven into the nest, a shallow dish glued together with saliva.

Finding a nest hole is the most crucial thing a swift has to do. Most individuals do not breed until their fourth year, but the young birds still make the migration journey and start looking for a safe, dark hole. Once they have found one, the young birds pair up and start to bring in feathers and other nest materials. →

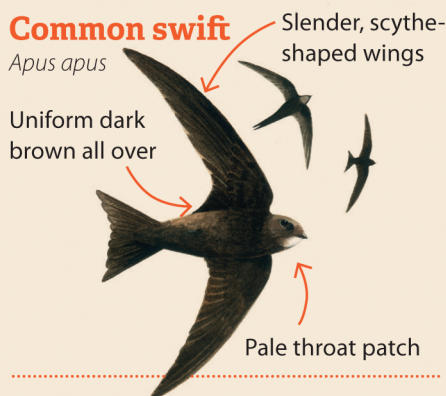


How to distinguish swifts

Swifts are not hirundines (the family of birds that includes swallows and martins), but they have a similar appearance and lifestyle, so are often confused with them

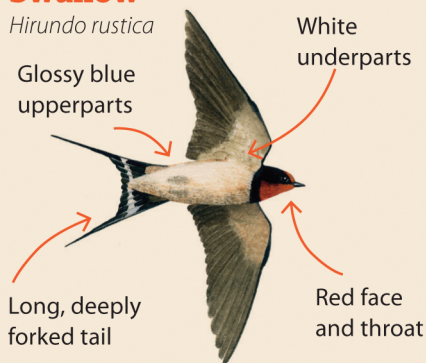
Common swift

Apus apus



Swallow

Hirundo rustica



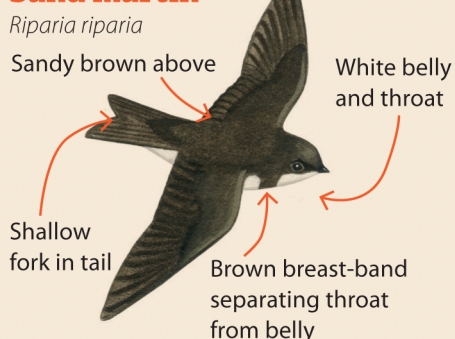
House martin

Delichon urbicum



Sand martin

Riparia riparia



Swifts like high, deep crevices to nest, but as many old buildings have been lost and roof spaces filled, their numbers have declined



The apparent joie de vivre of young swifts is breathtaking. You hear them before you see them, screeching over the rooftops in gangs of seven or eight, racing circuits around buildings. As the poet Ted Hughes put it:

*Their lunatic, limber scrambling frenzy
And their whirling blades
Sparkle out into blue*

Hughes also wrote the much-quoted lines about the swifts' return:

*They've made it again,
Which means the globe's still working,
the Creation's*

*Still waking refreshed, our summer's
Still all to come*

This anxiety about whether or not 'our' swifts will return each May is something most swift-watchers can relate to, but concerns have escalated since Ted Hughes's poem was published over 40 years ago, with a massive and alarming 57% decline in numbers in the UK recorded between 1995 and 2017.

For thousands of years, swifts have lived alongside us,

As traditional nest sites become scarce, you can help by fitting a wooden nest box to your home

because the homes and other buildings we constructed for ourselves have also suited them. Today though, we make it much harder for these birds to survive. Fewer insects is likely to be a factor – many other insectivorous birds are also in decline – but swifts are also up against a catastrophic loss of nesting cavities. Renovation of old buildings almost

Renovation of old buildings almost always results in access to swift nest holes being blocked





Swifts migrate between the UK and their wintering grounds south of the Sahara. They are the UK's fastest birds in level flight, reaching speeds of up to 69.3 mph

always results in access to their holes being blocked, while new housing tends to be sealed completely against nature. Modern building materials, such as plastic soffits (part of the eaves), offer little potential for future weathering and gaps opening up. We need to accommodate nesting swifts – and urgently.

Meet the swift champions

Thankfully, an inspirational movement of swift champions is coming to the rescue across the UK. Around 90 small groups are taking action locally. They run surveys to find swift breeding sites, work to prevent nesting holes from being blocked, install nestboxes, share information and help raise awareness through walks and talks – all with the support of their communities.

Several of these groups work with their regional Wildlife Trusts, which are perfectly positioned to assist grassroots action, such as nestbox schemes in church belfries and public buildings. The Wildlife Trusts also advocate the use of swift nest bricks – and nature-friendly green spaces – in new housing developments. Several Trusts are campaigning directly with local authorities and working with planners to get the installation of swift

nesting bricks (a brick with a hole behind which a nest box is fixed) written into local planning policy and building conditions.

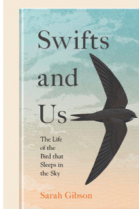
North Wales Wildlife Trust is particularly active on behalf of swifts. Ben Stammers, the Trust's people and wildlife officer, is passionate about the birds and, since 2014, has raised funds to install more than 300 nestboxes on schools, houses, university buildings, a community pub, a doctor's surgery, a theatre and a chapel in the area. More than 60 people have been trained as surveyors and, so far, 500 swift records have been submitted to their database. Dozens of talks, walks and other events have engaged more than 1,000 local people.

Ben sums up what it means to him: "Seeing joy in people's faces when they watch swifts on their own patch is so uplifting. I hope swifts can become an inspiration for how we can share our living space with wildlife, to the benefit of us all. If we can't find ways to help a species as fascinating and charismatic as the swift – and one so dependent on us – what hope is there?" I feel sure that's a sentiment we can all agree with. 🐦

GET INVOLVED

Five ways to help swifts

- 1 Ensure nesting holes are kept open when carrying out roof renovations or insulation
- 2 Put up a swift box on your house. Make sure it's at least five metres high
- 3 Stop using garden chemicals to support a healthy insect population
- 4 Keep records of swifts entering holes in buildings and tell your local record centre
- 5 Find out more about swifts and how you can help protect them at wildlifetrusts.org/swifts



Swifts & Us: The life of the bird that sleeps in the sky by Shropshire Wildlife Trust's Sarah Gibson will be published by William Collins this spring.

ILLUSTRATIONS: CHRIS SHIELDS, SWIFT AT EAVES: NICK UPTON, NEST BOX: NICK UPTON, SWIFTS IN FLIGHT: GRAHAM CATLEY



DARK OPS

East Cleveland Heritage Officer, **Kate Bartram**, tells us about her project's new piece of surveillance technology.



A S PART OF OUR WILD @ THE EDGES PROJECT, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust has recently acquired a night-vision and thermal scope to record the night time comings and goings of our local wildlife.

Thermal imaging cameras can record the small differences in heat given off by physical objects in the form of infra-red radiation. The night vision setting, on the other hand, uses its own projected infra-red light (which is invisible to the human eye) to illuminate the scene, which the sensitive camera sensors pick up to generate an image. These technologies give us an incredible advantage in our effort to observe and record the habits of wildlife at night, when most of our mammals are active.

Kenny Crooks, our mammal officer, has been out and about using the scope and had this to say, "The clarity

of the images is amazing and it gives a unique insight into animal behaviour at night. Since using the scope, I have seen animal behaviours that I've not witnessed before. This technology will be of real value for survey work".

If you'd like to see some of the short video clips we have captured already, we are sharing footage on our website. At the moment we have recorded: roe bucks play fighting; foxes courting; badger greetings; tawny owls hunting and hedgehog wanderings. Go to our website: www.teeswildlife.org and press the red YouTube button in the top right hand corner. Video clips will be added over the coming months as we build momentum with the project; so keep an eye out for new and unique insights into our rural wildlife - day or night!

This project is funded by National Lottery players through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Northumbrian Water.



Buying a bird box from us won't just help the birds...

NESTING SITES FOR BIRDS are becoming more and more scarce, as gardens become tidier and modern structures lose the usual opportunistic gaps and shelters beloved by birds like house martins and swallows. So there are few better (or more enjoyable) things you can do than put up a nest box (or two). There are nest boxes designed for almost any situation you can imagine and, as long as you consider what birds are coming to your area and where they like to live, you are almost certain to get some interested customers.

Here at Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, we are no strangers to nest boxes, having put up thousands over the years, all across the Tees Valley. Given this experience we think we can supply the right nest boxes for you. And you can be assured that every penny spent on a nest box from us will be ploughed right back into the Trust to help us to continue working for a Teesside (and a world) rich in wildlife for us all to enjoy. But more than that, we

...but the bees
and the butterflies
and the wildflowers
and the trees
and the mammals
and the amphibians
and the reptiles

want you to feel like you have a hand in directing where that money gets spent. So if you buy from us, you can choose from 10 categories that define many of the different areas we support (or make no selection, in which case we'll direct the funding to the areas most in need).

All our boxes are made with the help of volunteers, using materials sourced to have as low an impact on the environment as possible. We also aim to re-use and recycle materials gathered from local businesses and our own operations, to reduce waste.

- ☐ Woodlands
- ☒ Meadows
- ☐ Hedgerows
- ☐ Ponds
- ☐ Reedbeds
- ☐ Volunteer transport
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Infrastructure
- ☐ Mental Health & Wellbeing Projects
- ☐ Free Skills Workshops



For info or to place an order find us on facebook or contact us on info@teeswildlife.org

A man with short brown hair and a slight smile, wearing a purple and grey striped sweater, holds a large, rectangular wooden planter box. The planter is made of light-colored wood with a darker, weathered interior. The background is a workshop with various tools and equipment.

my life skills

MY WILD LIFE

Martin, Stockton-on-Tees

"Working with Mat on the Life Skills group, I've learned lots of new things. We've done dry-stone walling, blacksmithing, bushcraft and I made this planter for my mum. It's been great to make some new friends."

Find your wild life. Visit www.teeswildlife.org/how-you-can-help



TEES VALLEY