



**Leicestershire
& Rutland
Wildlife Trust**

2019

Please contact the
Wider Countryside
team for advice on
any conservation
management issues, or
to make an appointment
for a free site visit.

Uta Hamzaoui
0116 248 7364
uhamzaoui@lrwt.org.uk

Claire Install
0116 248 7367
cinstall@lrwt.org.uk

www.lrwt.org.uk

You can find out more
about the Charnwood
Forest Living Landscape
Project on our website
including downloadable
leaflets about the project
and how to encourage
more wildlife into your
garden.

If you know of someone
who might be interested
in receiving the newsletter
or if you would prefer not
to receive it, please let us
know.

Charnwood Forest Living
Landscape is supported by:



Charnwood Forest News



Welcome to our 2019 newsletter for landowners and managers in the Charnwood Forest with examples from our work over the last year and an article about how to bring back the flowers and species-rich grassland. Nature really needs our help now if we don't want to lose those plants and plant communities which are such a vital part of the Charnwood Forest and its wildlife.

A number of landowners very kindly gave us permission to survey their land which allowed us to find out more about the distribution and condition of the special habitats of the area. We are grateful for the opportunity to work closely with landowners to help conserve and improve the wildlife in the Charnwood Forest.

Pond clearance improves breeding habitat for newts

One of the projects paid for with our Charnwood Forest Small Grant was the clearance of Bullrush from a pond at Grace Dieu Priory last winter. During an amphibian survey in spring a locally important population of hundreds of Smooth Newts were seen in the newly cleared open water area. Ponds are exceptionally important freshwater habitats, supporting more plants and animals than other waterbody type.



Clearance work at Grace Dieu Priory pond last winter has significantly increased the habitat for breeding amphibians. Photo: Friends of Grace Dieu Priory.

New cut and collect machine



Photo: Neil Pilcher

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust have acquired a new cut and collect machine thanks to funding from The Banister Charitable Trust and The National Forest Company. This new machine will be used for managing small meadows or difficult sites on our own as well as private land where conventional mowers or other machinery would be too large and heavy. These are species-rich meadows in small fields, often on ridge and furrow, or marshy grassland on very wet ground, which are threatened to be smothered by tall coarse grass or scrub if not managed sympathetically.

Bee-medicine found in heather nectar

Scientists at Kew Gardens have discovered a chemical compound in Heather that protects bumblebees from being infected with a common parasite. Finding out about this particular medicinal property shows that flowers provide more benefits than just being a food source and that one plant cannot easily be replaced by another species, e.g. from a seed mix. Heather is one of the plants that have declined sharply in England and are still threatened by many factors including lack of appropriate management, habitat loss and air pollution.



The Wildlife Trust carries out long term monitoring surveys where Aggregate Industries has restored heathland and where heather is now thriving. Photo: Uta Hamzaoui.

Bringing the flowers back

How you can help restore species-rich meadows

One of the most threatened habitats in the country and in the Charnwood Forest is species-rich old grassland. In the last hundred years, 97% of all species-rich grassland has been lost, mainly due to agricultural improvement or development. The Charnwood Forest has some particularly good examples of species-rich old meadows, some of them owned by the Wildlife Trust, but many are now small and isolated and the populations of many of the species within meadows are so small that they are unlikely to survive without our help.

While it is a priority to conserve these last remnant meadows as hubs from which species can spread outwards, it is also vital to restore and connect them where possible.

Many landowners wish to restore some of their land to species-rich meadows to bring back the plants which used to be a common sight in the countryside as well as all the butterflies, bees, grasshoppers and other animals that live in them. Using commercially available seed-mixes seems to be an easy, albeit expensive, solution. These



The plants in the Charnwood Forest are adapted to the local conditions and grow in communities which are characteristic of the area. Herbert's Meadow at Ulverscroft NR is a particularly species-rich meadow and the only location left in the county for some rare grassland species. Photo: Jamie Gould.

mixes, however, can include seeds of species which are not native to our area or even to the country and would not normally grow here. They might look pretty but could threaten the distinctiveness and local natural genetic variation of the local flora.

The best way to restore species-rich meadows is using local seeds. This

can be by **natural regeneration from the soil seedbank** by relaxing the management of a site or by linking up to an adjacent flower-rich field from which species can spread by **natural colonisation** or seeds transferred by livestock or wild animals. The Wildlife trust has successfully restored species-rich meadows from the seedbank on former low-input arable land at Warren Hills.

Another option is **collecting green hay from a local species-rich meadow**, at the point when the seeds are ripe but have not yet dropped from the plants. This green hay will then be spread on the new site where the seeds will drop onto the carefully prepared soil and germinate. This would not only help to create a new habitat for wildlife but also to preserve our local species.

If you want to help save the local flora of the Charnwood Forest and have either a species-rich meadow from which to take green hay or land on which you would like to restore flower-rich grassland - or both - please get in touch with the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust for advice.



Photo: Andy Nielson

Cutting with scythes can be a good way to manage small traditional meadows and preserve their distinctive plant communities. The Wildlife Trust organised a scything course for staff and volunteers on a small but species-rich meadow on Ulverscroft NR which is difficult to reach with machinery. Although labour intensive, scything is wildlife friendly and can also be done on wet soil without causing damaging compaction.