



**Leicestershire  
& Rutland  
Wildlife Trust**

**Autumn 2018**

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

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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  
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# Charnwood Forest News



Welcome to our autumn 2018 newsletter for landowners and managers in the Charnwood Forest. This edition is about work the Trust has done over the past year, about The Wildlife Trust's 'Wilder Britain' campaign and about a special habitat that needs particular attention to conserve it in the Forest.

We would like to use this opportunity to thank all the landowners in the Charnwood Forest who gave us permission to survey their land over the past few years and showed an interest in our findings. Many landowners and farmers appreciate the wildlife on their land and try to make space for it where they can. Our aim is to continue to contribute to the work landowners already do to ensure that the wildlife, that has lived here alongside people for thousands of years, continues to make the Charnwood Forest such a special place.

## Rare bat found during wildlife surveys in Charnwood Forest

During a survey at Bardon Hill, our team of licenced bat surveyors found a breeding pair of the rare Leisler's bat. This is just one highlight resulting from our surveys of species and habitats in the Charnwood Forest and shows the importance of working in close partnership with landowners ranging from small farms to large estates. Without these surveys we would not be able to find out about the wildlife that lives in the area and how we can help it to prosper.

We were also very pleased that our surveys could confirm that the management of the Trust's Lea



The rare Leisler's Bat and the Green Hairstreak butterfly were found during the surveys. Photos: B. Devine and LRWT



Volunteers are invaluable in helping the Trust with monitoring surveys, here at Lea Meadows NR. Photo: Uta Hamzaoui.

Meadows NR is maintaining its rich plant community including some rare plant species. This is one of the sites where we carry out monitoring surveys every 5 to 10 years to understand how the management practices are affecting wildlife.

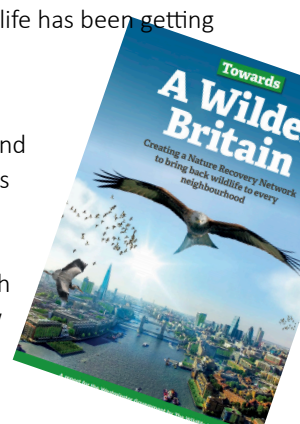
Weekly butterfly surveys have been carried out by volunteers at Charnwood Lodge NR and on private land. Although we also notice that insect numbers are plummeting in general, the hot summer seemed to be a good year for butterflies and species such as Green Hairstreak and the Wall Butterfly were seen on the regular walks.

If you have land in the Charnwood Forest and would like us to carry out a free survey, we would be pleased to hear from you.

## A Wilder Britain - A critical moment to reverse the decline of nature

The Wildlife Trusts are calling for a wilder, better Britain. We know from research across the globe that a healthy, wildlife-rich natural world is essential for our wellbeing and prosperity. But wildlife has been getting less common for decades. Wild places are scarcer, smaller and more isolated.

Nature needs to recover – for the sake of wild plants and animals, and for everything it brings us: better health, climate control, flood management, enjoyment, employment and more. Charnwood Forest is the richest area for wildlife in our two counties, but even this is declining in quality with fragmented areas of habitat. Along with other Wildlife Trusts, we are asking that the new Environmental Bill promised by Theresa May is ambitious in ensuring that our wildlife can recover. The Wildlife Trusts have produced a booklet which sets out how we can bring about nature's recovery. To see a copy of this or find out how you can help us in our quest for wildlife legislation that works for wildlife and people, please contact Claire Install.





# Charnwood Forest's ancient meadows and pastures are teeming with life

The Charnwood Forest is shaped by its volcanic origin which makes it a special landscape in the English lowlands. The hard volcanic rocks influence the soils and make them acidic and poor. As a result they have always been rather unattractive for farming. This is the reason why the Charnwood Forest is still rich in biodiversity. Consequently, more important habitats, such as heathland, old woodland and species-rich grassland, remain in the Charnwood Forest than in the rest of the county.



This golden Click Beetle and the Forester Moth are two invertebrate species now only found on few remaining old grassland sites. Photos: Uta Hamzaoui.

Of these now scarce habitats, ancient grassland is particularly important for a wide range of species and some of the best quality grassland can be found in the Charnwood Forest. Grasslands have provided food for livestock for centuries and depend on regular grazing or cutting for hay. Despite being man-made habitats they support a rich community of flora and fauna that have adapted to these conditions over the centuries.

The soil determines the different types of grassland with heath grassland being the most characteristic of the area on acidic soils around hill tops. Neutral grassland occurs on deeper and less acidic soils on the lower slopes and marshy grassland can be found where the soil is wet in flushes or along streams. A number of plants are only found in these particular conditions.

The best grassland sites support a mix of these types, such as Herbert's Meadow in the Ulverscroft Nature Reserve where over 140 plant species have been recorded. All these plants provide food for many invertebrates and in summer the meadows are alive with butterflies, bees and hoverflies. Species-rich grassland is therefore also an important habitat for many birds that feed on the insects and seeds.

Although old unimproved but species-rich grasslands might be less productive than improved species-poor pastures or silage fields, many farmers value them for their balanced nutrient content and because livestock prefers the hay and pastures.

Today only very few of these old grassland sites remain and the vast majority has been lost over the last century through agricultural improvement, such as the use of fertilisers and herbicides, drainage and tree planting, as well as building development. Where the grasslands remain they are now often threatened by lack of management allowing scrub to encroach. Heavy grazing with ponies or other livestock can also reduce the value of these sites for wildlife.

Safeguarding the last Charnwood Forest grassland sites with all their associated species is a conservation priority. The



Heath Milkwort has become a scarce plant in Leicestershire but can still be found on heath grassland in the Charnwood Forest. Photo: Uta Hamzaoui



Bird's-foot-trefoil (here with Selfheal) is a valuable protein source in fodder and also produces large amounts of nutritious pollen for insects. Photo: LRWT

Wildlife Trust manages grasslands on its reserves and also helps landowners by providing management advice. There are projects to restore land to species-rich grassland but for many species it will take decades or even centuries to return.

If you own grassland and are interested to find out what species are present and how to look after it, please let Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust know to arrange a free visit. The Trust also has a small grant scheme to support landowners and farmers to manage their grassland with wildlife in mind and can help with free surveys to support Countryside Stewardship applications. Please see our contact details on the front page.



At Charnwood Lodge NR the Trust has restored grassland on five former arable fields which are cut for hay and aftermath grazed. Photo: Uta Hamzaoui