**Tern – Spring 2024**

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# Welcome from the Chief Executive

Welcome to the first Tern of 2024.

The year began with the sad news of the death of our former Chief Executive Brendan Joyce OBE. Over his 23 years at the helm, Brendan was instrumental in the progress of NWT, conceiving and leading many ground-breaking projects. In the summer issue of Tern, we will reflect more on his impressive achievements.

Climate change is the focus of this issue: the greatest long-term threat faced by nature and people. As our President exemplifies on [page 23](#_From_the_President) a quick glance through local news headlines clearly demonstrates that Norfolk is already being affected.

We know that nature can help us manage the impacts of climate change and protecting it has vital benefits for wildlife and humans alike. We are grateful to our Vice President, Dr Jeff Price, for providing such an in-depth analysis of the complex picture of climate and biodiversity in our county ([page 11](#_Climate_change_and)).

I am proud to share some of the actions we are taking to address the climate crisis. Protecting our carbon-capturing peatlands has never been more important. Read about how we’re restoring wetlands across our west Norfolk reserves ([page 14](#_Protecting_our_peatlands)) and in the Fens ([page 15](#_Work_of_Fens)).

Rising sea levels and coastal erosion are affecting some of our most precious wildlife reserves. On [page 16](#_Adapting_to_climate) you can read about how we’re adapting our landscapes at NWT Cley and Salthouse Marshes.

Climate change can feel overwhelming, but as members you are already making a difference through supporting our work. Together we can ensure that nature always has a home here in Norfolk.

Eliot Lyne

# Membership, contact and publication details

## Become a member

Norfolk Wildlife Trust is a charity dedicated to all aspects of wildlife conservation in Norfolk. Established in 1926, we are the oldest in a partnership of 47 Wildlife Trusts located throughout the UK.

As a member of NWT, you will help us to create a Living Landscape for Norfolk, where there is more space for wildlife, better connection of wildlife habitats and where people live healthier, more sustainable lives. You will help us look after more than 50 fantastic nature reserves, ensuring they remain havens for wildlife and people.

If you are not already a member of NWT, please join today. Alternatively, you could give membership as a rewarding and worthwhile gift to a friend or relative. To become a member from as little as £3 a month you can:

• Visit our website [norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk](https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk)

• Call us on 01603 625540

• Ask a member of staff at one of our five visitor centres

## Tern publication details

Tern is published three times a year by Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

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# Wild News

Highlights from Norfolk and national news from The Wildlife Trusts

## Our former leader, Brendan Joyce OBE

**Everyone at Norfolk Wildlife Trust has been deeply saddened to hear of the death of former Chief Executive Brendan Joyce OBE.**

Brendan rose quickly through the ranks at the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, becoming National Director of Programmes prior to joining Norfolk Wildlife Trust as CEO in 1995.

He served as Chief Executive for 23 years – from 1995 to 2018. It is no exaggeration to say that Brendan towers over NWT’s story, having been at the helm for over a fifth of our long history. He contributed as much as anyone – since our founder Dr Sydney Long – to our ambition, growth and development. In recognition of this, he was awarded the Christopher Cadbury Medal in 2011 and an OBE for services to nature conservation in 2017.

Brendan conceived and led many ground-breaking projects and initiatives during his time at NWT. These included the construction of a state-of-the-art visitor centre at Cley and Salthouse Marshes and the subsequent major expansion of the reserve and creation of the Simon Aspinall Wildlife Education Centre; the purchase and landscape-scale restoration of Grimston Warren; the significant expansion of Upton Broad and Marshes; and the acquisition of Thorpe Marshes, NWT’s first urban nature reserve.

In the summer issue of Tern we will reflect at length on our great debt of gratitude to Brendan Joyce OBE, for all he achieved during his long service at Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

## Catastrophic impacts on nature predicted if Wash Barrier goes ahead

In partnership with other conservation charities, we are warning of catastrophic damage to one of the UK’s most important wetlands if a proposed tidal barrier on The Wash goes ahead.

Our Planning and Advocacy Manager, Mike Jones, spoke at a public meeting in Hunstanton in early November. He highlighted the global importance for nature and people of this vital estuarine environment and presented evidence of the disastrous impacts on wildlife of comparable developments around the world. His talk was very well received by the audience.

Conservation organisations and local businesses including NWT, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, RSPB and Wild Ken Hill remain frustrated by the lack of transparency from the developer, Centre Port Ltd, which has still released only vague plans.

The Wash is currently under consideration for UNESCO World Heritage status as part of England’s East Coast wetlands, in recognition of its global importance for wildlife. However, the future protection of this exceptional area could be dealt a significant blow if the gigantic infrastructure project is given the green light. The tidal barrage development threatens to cause enormous damage to one of Europe’s most important wetland habitats for wildlife.

‘We are facing a joint biodiversity and climate crisis and the two are inextricably linked,’ says Mike Jones. ‘To address one, it is crucial we address the other, which is why we must put nature at the heart of our decision-making, including development and infrastructure planning on our land, coast and sea.’

The importance of The Wash is recognised in national and international environmental designations including Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Ramsar site and Special Protection Area (SPA).

## Discovering Ranworth

With the successful completion of our Discovering Ranworth project, NWT Ranworth Broad is the perfect place for a family foray into nature this spring.

Thanks to a wide range of generous NWT supporters, including Essex & Suffolk Water, Norwich Freemen’s Charity and The Ranworth Trust, we have a host of new ways for you to discover the unique wildlife of the Broads with your little ones.

The new Alder Hide, found nestled along the boardwalk, has already been delighting visitors with close-up sightings of kingfishers and otters. With a bit of patience and luck, you could be next!

On the upper floor of the Visitor Centre, our family discovery centre is packed with brand new wildlife-themed activities. Enjoy magnetic games, play ‘guess that skull’, measure your wingspan against Norfolk birds of prey, or gather round the storytelling chair to enjoy some wild tales.

On the way out, pick up a copy of our new children’s quiz pack to transform a journey along the boardwalk into a wild adventure with fun facts, quizzes and wildlife spotter sheets, all themed around the fascinating plants and animals living in Ranworth’s woodland, reedbed and open water.

As the weather warms up, make a day of it by heading out on our daily 40-minute boat trips around the Broad with our experienced wildlife guide.

## A place to remember

A memorial bench has been installed at NWT Roydon Common in memory of Phillip Poll, a renowned conservationist and long-term volunteer on the reserve.

‘Phil made a significant contribution to conservation in west Norfolk over many decades and was an ardent supporter of Norfolk Wildlife Trust,’ says Ash Murray, NWT West Norfolk Reserves Manager. ‘He quietly encouraged many people to take action for nature and was always very generous with his knowledge. He had a profound love of west Norfolk; its people, habitats and landscapes. Like many others, I will miss his wry smile, self-effacing approach and boundless enthusiasm.’

Phil was also a member of Gaywood Conservation Group. Chair and friend, John Hayes, recalls him fondly: ‘Ten years ago, NWT started the Gaywood Valley project, from which the Conservation Group was formed. Phil’s previous 20 years of experience, knowledge and enthusiasm for wildlife was clear. He became my right-hand man whenever we had a new task to assess. He quietly got on with jobs, carried tools to site and was always a popular and respected member of the group. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him.’

## I-spy a very rare fly

An extremely rare fly was found recently at NWT Holme Dunes; so rare, in fact, that it had previously been recorded just once in the UK, in Scotland as long ago as 1910! Rob Stephens was on one of his regular visits to Norfolk from his south-coast home when, on a rather wet day, he dropped in at NWT Holme Dunes.

‘I tend to look for small creatures, plants and fungi,’ Rob explained. ‘Having just bought myself a new camera I was keen to try it out. I took a side path into a dip in the dunes in the hope of finding shelter from the breeze. There was little about in the way of insects, but by pure chance I spotted a couple of flies on a holly branch. One took off, leaving the nice pinkish one behind, so I took a few photos.

‘I didn’t have a clue about its rarity at the time,’ Rob continued. ‘I’m fairly clueless about flies, though I find them fascinating. I managed to get it down to being one of the Heleomyzid family, but not which species, so I posted it on social media for help with ID.’

The photo eventually reached Ian Andrew, organiser of the Heleomyzid Recording Scheme. After conferring with European specialist Andrzej Woznica, Ian confirmed the fly as Schroederella iners. As might be expected, very little is known about such a rare fly. It appears from late October to December and is normally found in Central Europe. Strangely, considering its appearance in north Norfolk, the species is more commonly associated with snowfields.

## Western Link update

In December last year we received the disappointing news that Norfolk County Council has given the green light for a planning application to be submitted for the damaging Norwich Western Link road.

This January saw the Great Big March against the proposed development take place, organised by Stop the Wensum Link campaign group. NWT Ambassador, Nick Acheson, spoke at the event, as we continue to join with partners to campaign to protect the rolling hills, river valleys, marshes and woodlands that the road threatens, as well as the rare bats that live there.

When the planning application goes in, it will be followed by a public consultation inviting us all to have our say. During the consultation period, we will share our response to the Western Link planning application along with specific actions you can take, including an e-action.

For the most up-to-date information on our concerns, consultation response and what you can do to help to campaign against the road, visit [norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/ndr](https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/ndr)

## NWT takes on a popular Hickling pub

**Late last year we were delighted to announce that we had purchased the Pleasure Boat Inn at Hickling Staithe.**

The purchase of the pub, with adjacent buildings, a large car park, public toilets and an associated mooring, complements our existing land and property holdings around Hickling Broad and Marshes.

‘At its heart,’ says NWT CEO Eliot Lyne, ‘the pub purchase supports our new strategy, A Wilder Norfolk for All, which demands that we not just protect nature, but that we also support its recovery. We know that this is going to involve everyone. And we know too that the key to ensuring that people will be moved to protect nature is to give them new ways to enjoy and value Norfolk’s incredible wildlife. Welcoming people into the world of Norfolk’s wildlife in and around our new pub will enable us to reach thousands of people who wouldn’t usually visit one of our nature reserves or visitor centres.’

To this end, we will create new facilities that enable visitors to experience Hickling’s exceptional wildlife in a place where nature, the community and the local economy are thriving together. Visitors will be able to find out more about Hickling Broad and its wildlife and take boat trips onto the largest of the Norfolk Broads.

Our Visitor Centre at Hickling Broad and Marshes, and all the activities we run there for naturalists, schools, families and other visitors, will remain unchanged. We look forward to sharing news of the pub reopening, with new nature interpretation facilities and activities, later this year.

## New tree nursery established at Foxley Wood

Our new tree nursery is now in operation at Foxley Wood, thanks to hard work and thorough research by our Woodlands Team. They have been busy collecting seed from Ashwellthorpe Lower Wood, Foxley Wood and mid-Norfolk heathlands, from which we will grow a stock of trees for use across our woodland creation sites. This will be especially important in the Foxley Enclave, previously arable land on the edge of the wood that we are working to restore.

NWT Woodland Assistant, Lydia Kittle said, ‘Starting the tree nursery has been a complex business, due to the individual needs of different seeds. Wild service tree, for example, needs to be kept in an environment that alternates between warm and cold for up to four to six months. This is a species we rarely see, but it’s a key ancient woodland indicator. We’re looking forward to seeing more of them back in our treescapes.

‘Having seed of local provenance helps to prevent the spread of disease. It also ensures we’re raising species that will thrive and eventually reproduce here in Norfolk.’

The tree nursery was funded by the Trees Outside Woodlands project, led by The Tree Council in partnership with Defra, Natural England and five local authorities including Norfolk County Council. The aims of the project are to increase tree cover in non-woodland areas, to increase access to nature within communities, to improve people’s health and wellbeing, and to help mitigate the effects of climate change.

## Robert Gillmor Retrospective

**NWT Cley Marshes Visitor Centre**

**Saturday 17 February – Wednesday 17 April 2024**

**10am – 4pm daily**

**Free entry**

We are honoured to host a retrospective exhibition of the work of Robert Gillmor, renowned Cley-based artist, former president of the Society of Wildlife Artists and long-term supporter of NWT. Robert’s work is well known in the world of natural history, not least for gracing the covers of the New Naturalist series. Robert’s beautiful lino prints celebrate the natural world and many were inspired by the wildlife of NWT Cley Marshes.

Please do visit us to enjoy this stunning exhibition.

We extend our thanks to the Gillmor family for their continued support.

# Species spotlight

## Willow warbler

Migrating from Africa south of the Sahara, willow warblers are common summer visitors. However, across southern and eastern England, the willow warbler is in rapid decline. The BTO’s Breeding Bird Survey reveals willow warbler numbers across the UK fell by 40% in the last 20 years, with the decline steepest in the last five years. Habitat loss and insect population declines are of course relevant, but clearly not the key drivers of the willow warbler’s decline, as its near-identical cousin the chiff chaff has doubled in number over the same period. The full picture is complex.

The willow warbler undertakes a far longer, more challenging migration than its cousin the chiff chaff. Still more significantly, the core breeding range of the willow warbler has shifted northwards, in response to a 1°C rise in average UK temperature. More birds now breed in Scotland, though not enough to offset the significant losses further south.

Like countless other species – many of them less cherished and less obvious – the willow warbler is attempting to adapt to the challenges of anthropogenic climate change. It is vital we both limit climate change and provide suitable, connected habitats in which species, including willow warblers, can adapt. Failure to do so will mean the loss of this songster’s gorgeous silvery voice from Norfolk’s spring chorus.

# Wildlife roundup

**By Robin Chittenden – Wildlife photographer and writer**

## Autumn highlights

**The warm autumn saw the arrival of several swifts, which mostly turned out to be pallid swifts. These normally breed in eastern and southern Europe, but in recent years have become a late-autumn fixture in Norfolk, though only in tiny numbers. As their name suggests they are paler than our summering common swifts, but only subtly so.**

When seeing them from below as silhouettes the differences are hard to detect, especially on dull days. Photography can help as you can adjust the exposure to reveal the true colours of the bird. Most pallid swifts spend a day or less where they are initially spotted, before moving on, but one at Winterton stayed for a week. Swifts are renowned as nonstop flyers, landing only to breed – often in roof spaces – but this one roosted in the church bell tower.

During late autumn there was an unusual gathering of seabirds off the Norfolk coast, particularly between Blakeney Point and Weybourne. For some reason, sprats, small whitefish that move in shoals, were close to the shore. They were perhaps driven there by predatory fish, such as sea bass. The large number of sprats also attracted seabird predators. Perhaps the most dramatic were the gannets. Most were young birds, which seemed to be honing their skill at plunge diving. Flocks of common and sandwich terns and a few arctic terns, plus – unusually – up to six roseate terns, joined the melee; as did several Manx shearwaters and many auks (razorbills and a few guillemots), all intent on catching sprats.

A few pale-coloured variants of what would normally be dark birds were seen in Norfolk last year. For the second year, a particularly pale oystercatcher hatched on The Wash. And in Norwich there was a pale cormorant, which was seen anywhere between Whitlingham Country Park, UEA and the River Wensum beside NWT’s new Sweet Briar Marshes reserve. Photographs imply there may have been two pale cormorants present.

After a break of a few years, exciting numbers of waxwings returned to the UK this winter. Their plumage and scarcity make them one of the favourite birds of UK birdwatchers, wildlife photographers and shoppers. Their habit of being unconcerned by humans and feeding on berries in conurbations, especially in supermarket car parks, helps maintain this status. They arrive here when they run out of food in Scandinavia and Siberia. This could be because the berry crop there was not good, or perhaps their breeding was so successful this year that berries there didn’t last long.

New Costessey was visited by a waxwing flock of up to 81 birds. They last visited these very same berry trees six years ago. Perhaps they went straight there, and were not distracted by the numerous other berry trees on offer in Norwich, because some of the mature adults had been there before and were leading birds born in the last six years straight to the spot. Six years ago, a group of the berry trees was being guarded by a mistle thrush (which wanted the berries all to itself) and these trees now have three bunches of mature mistletoe growing on their branches. These weren’t there six years ago, so it’s possible the mistletoe seeds were secreted on the branches in the droppings of that very mistle thrush.

The waxwings, as usual, spent most of the day at the tops of the tall trees next to the berry trees. Here they spent their time digesting berries and preening. Every twenty minutes or so, hunger would persuade a bird to tentatively fly down to a berry tree. Once it was apparent there was no danger, the rest swooped down and frantically gobbled away. Having stored a load of berries in their cheeks, almost hamster-like, they would then rush back up to the taller trees. In warmer weather a few would fly out every now and then to nab a passing insect.

In other news, returning rarities this winter include the pallid harrier at Warham Greens and the long-billed dowitcher at NWT Cley Marshes.

## Wildlife to look for in spring

Some of our ancient woodland plants, such as bluebell and wood anemone, are very well known but others are neglected. Here are some more obscure ancient woodland plants to appreciate this spring.

**Moschatel** is a small plant of damp woods whose flowers have two unusual features, the first being that they are pale green. The second, from which the plant’s alternative name of town hall clock is derived, is that they are arranged in sets of five, with four facing outwards in a square and the fifth facing upwards.

**Sanicle** is an atypical member of the carrot family, in that its flowers are arranged in tight pinkish-white pompoms. This scarce plant has long been used medicinally, a fact reflected in its name, which is probably derived from the Latin for healing.

Commoner than moschatel and sanicle, **Dog’s mercury** is another wholly green plant. It is dioecious, meaning it has separate male and female individuals, though it spreads largely through underground stems, known as rhizomes. A member of the spurge family, like many of its relatives it is toxic.

# Plans revealed for Sweet Briar Marshes

**The long-term vision for our newest nature reserve, NWT Sweet Briar Marshes, has been revealed. We now have sketches, maps and design ideas which will inform how the nature reserve takes shape. The addition of facilities will take place sensitively in phases over the next few years, complementing work to improve habitats for wildlife and increase biodiversity**.

The first phase of work will include paths, information points and maps, lookouts, seats, bird-viewing points and pond dipping areas. We will also be introducing a small grazing herd of cattle to help with habitat management, thanks to funding from Biffa Award, as part of the Landfill Communities Fund, that will pay for the infrastructure needed.

Other priorities include a small area of accessible parking, a visitor hub, bridges and walkways. These will take longer as they require planning permission, further design, consultation and fundraising.

Since January 2023, we have been talking to the communities surrounding Sweet Briar Marshes. We have asked them what they want from Norfolk’s newest nature reserve. Every one of the more than 1,000 people we heard from provided vital insights. Most shared our desire that the area should be kept as natural as possible, with facilities to enable people to connect with nature. Together we generated the ideas and feelings that our landscape architects, Sheils Flynn, have used to guide the design.

NWT Sweet Briar Marshes will be open to the public in spring 2024. We are excited to share this wonderful wild place with you.

View all the concept designs and ideas at [norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/sharedvision](https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/sharedvision)

## The start of the story

We purchased Sweet Briar Marshes in 2022, thanks to tremendous financial support from project partners Aviva, the Geoffrey Watling Charity, Shelroy Charitable Trust, The Paul Bassham and Leslie Mary Carter Charitable Trusts (among others), and wonderful public donations.

Long-term supporter Aviva generously pledged up to £300,000 in match funding to our Sweet Briar Appeal. We are grateful for Aviva’s continuing support.

## Urban opportunity

The 90 acres of Sweet Briar Marshes run alongside Marriott’s Way in the northeast of Norwich. Fen, rough meadow, grazing marsh, scrub, old hedgerows, veteran oak trees and young woodland can all be found here. The site is of crucial importance to wildlife, both because of its species and habitats and because it borders the river Wensum, Norfolk’s longest and most connected wildlife corridor.

Aside from its superb biodiversity – over 200 flowering plants and six species of bat are among the many findings of our surveys – it is the urban location of Sweet Briar Marshes that most excites us. Around 25,000 people live within a 15-minute walk of the reserve and there are over 20 schools within a two-mile radius. Not only does the reserve offer a nature boost to an urban population; it also allows us to inspire even more people to care about Norfolk’s wildlife.

## Profile

### Our County Wildlife Site team

From ancient woodlands and flower meadows to wildlife oases in our towns and cities, there are hundreds of quiet, often unnoticed places where wildlife thrives – thanks to their designation as County Wildlife Sites. County Wildlife Site Manager, Sam Brown, and her team oversee vital work protecting these special places across Norfolk. Sam explains what this entails:

We’ve recently expanded our team and I’m happy to say there are now four of us, which is good as we have a lot to do! Essentially our work involves creating more space for Norfolk’s nature to thrive and move across the landscape via the designation and management of County Wildlife Sites.

Much of our time is spent working with landowners across Norfolk, giving advice and support on conservation management of their land. County Wildlife Sites don’t receive any protection by law, but they do have some safeguards through the planning system. Some of our work involves advising planning authorities, developers and others on how to ensure they remain places of sanctuary for wildlife. In 2022-2023 we offered advice on over 70 sites detailing how to bring the land into the best condition for wildlife.

We visit existing sites to see how nature is faring, as well as potential new sites. A County Wildlife Site could be an ancient woodland within a large estate or a small community-owned plot of land. This means we get to meet and advise a variety of people from different backgrounds, and this is an aspect I really enjoy. As well as providing conservation and land management advice, we also provide wraparound support such as facilitating partnerships or volunteers. For example, we might identify that a CWS would benefit from being grazed and help the landowner to find a suitable grazier.

The nature of our work varies depending on the season. In spring and summer, we’re out across the county surveying new and existing CWS. Our aim is to identify habitats and plant species that indicate nature-friendly habitat – we call these positive indicator species. In a fen, for example, you might be looking for plants such as fen bedstraw, orchid species or meadow rue. Ancient woodland indicators might be English bluebell or wood anemone.

In the autumn and winter months, we write up what we’ve seen and discovered. These reports are sent to landowners and to Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service as part of the annual CWS update. The information gained from these surveys tells us what needs to happen at each site to benefit wildlife. Throughout the year we go on to offer management advice, organising contractors and volunteer groups for tasks such as fencing, mowing and scrub clearance.

I joined Norfolk Wildlife Trust because of my love of nature and my desire to work alongside communities to create positive change. To aid nature’s recovery in Norfolk, we must increase the amount of space positively managed for it. County Wildlife Sites and those that care for them play a vital role in achieving this vision.

If you own or know of some wildlife-rich land which could be designated as a CWS, please get in touch. However large or small the space, it is equally valid.

[cws@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:cws@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk)

## What is a county wildlife site?

CWS are areas of land rich in wildlife. Outside nationally protected areas (such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserves), they are the best areas for wildlife in Norfolk. There are more than 1,300 CWS in all, making them a fantastic resource for wildlife. They can support both locally and nationally threatened wildlife species and habitats. They also complement nature reserves by helping to maintain links between them and are a key asset in nature recovery across Norfolk. Most CWS are privately owned and do not have public access.

# Celebrating Nextdoor Nature

**Nextdoor Nature is The Wildlife Trusts’ innovative people and nature programme, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Since its launch two years ago, hundreds of groups across the country have received support in creating community gardens and wilder neighbourhoods, in improving nature connectedness for people, and in providing habitat for wildlife.**

Here in Norfolk, we’ve been talking to communities in the Mile Cross, Marlpit, North Earlham and Wensum wards in the northwest of Norwich. We asked how we could help make the area better for wildlife and people; and we received a fantastic response. Spring bulb planting, pond creation, community food-growing, wildflower-sowing and tree-planting are just some of the nature-boosting initiatives carried out by people and groups so far.

Nextdoor Nature Officer, Lee Cozens, has spent the last two years getting to know people who live and work in the community and exploring ways that they can work together. ‘Nextdoor Nature,’ Lee says, ‘is all about supporting communities to make changes so that nature can flourish where they live, while also creating new bonds and relationships that improve quality of life too. It’s been brilliant to see how much is already happening in the area – these are strong and vibrant communities. The Community Enabling team from Norwich City Council has also been vital in the success of many of the projects, especially those on council-owned land. The project has all been about building great partnerships.

‘With the fantastic NWT Sweet Briar Marshes at the core of this area, every small act for wildlife, whether it be a wildflower meadow in a local park, or bird and bat boxes in gardens, or hedgehog-friendly streets, will create a patchwork of thriving spaces for nature to travel across the city to other wild spaces.’

Nextdoor Nature in Norwich is a pilot project, but Lee hopes that this is just the beginning of a green revolution in the area, which will spread throughout the city. ‘One of the highlights for me has been the formation of The Green Hearts, a sub-group of an existing Mile Cross network known as Mxpeg. Green Hearts is all about restoring nature in the community and great things have been taking place so far – there’s a real buzz and people are excited about the changes they are making to their green spaces.

‘Moving forward, we’ll continue to work closely alongside the community, many of whom have also been involved in the shared vision for Sweet Briar Marshes. Our Nextdoor Nature work will also help inform our wider urban strategy – helping us to inspire even more people to act and care for nature.’

## Nextdoor Nature projects

* Planting for pollinators
* Bulb planting ready for the spring
* Creating wildflower patches in disused spaces
* Making pallet planters out of recycled wood
* Growing food for the community to share

To find out more about Nextdoor Nature projects in Norwich and read project case studies visit: [norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/nextdoornature](https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/nextdoornature)

# Climate change and biodiversity in Norfolk

Dr Jeff Price is Associate Professor of Climate Change and Biodiversity at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, University of East Anglia and a Vice President of Norfolk Wildlife Trust. We asked for his thoughts on climate change and biodiversity.

## The biodiversity and climate emergencies are real

Recent studies estimate that, globally, two million species are at risk of extinction, doubling the estimates of just a few years ago. Many experts also consider that the Earth is currently in the middle of a sixth mass extinction event. Extinction rates are estimated to be tens to hundreds of times the background rate and accelerating. This is mostly without consideration of how climate change will add to the other impacts on biodiversity. Yet one study on local extinctions found that climate change was associated with approximately 46 per cent of the species studied and, globally, at least three species have gone extinct largely owing to climate change. The Paris Agreement on climate change has a goal of holding ‘the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels’ and pursuing efforts ‘to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.’ Yet the Climate Action Tracker currently has the globe 1.3°C warmer than pre-industrial levels with policies and actions currently being taken placing the globe on track for 2.7°C (2.3° to 3.4°) of warming – far above what would be considered ‘safe’ limits, especially for biodiversity.

Work undertaken by Rachel Warren (Tyndall Centre, UEA) and her colleagues (Science, 2018), found that almost half of the terrestrial insects, just under half the plants, and 26 per cent of the vertebrates (birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians) were projected to lose more than half of their climatic range with 3.2°C of warming. However, holding warming to 2°C would reduce this to 18 per cent of the insects, 16 per cent of the plants, and 8 per cent of the vertebrates; with 1.5°C of warming this is further reduced to 6 per cent of the insects, 8 per cent of the plants, and 4 per cent of the vertebrates. Thus, meeting the Paris Agreement would have major benefits to biodiversity conservation compared to society’s current trajectory.

## What about Norfolk?

There will be species projected to disappear locally as their climatic ranges become unsuitable, and others that might start appearing more regularly. Determining which of the species beginning to appear more regularly may be attributed to climate change is difficult. Some species that do not regularly occur in Norfolk ‘should’ be here based on climate, but other barriers (especially the North Sea) are obstacles to their colonisation/recolonisation. Lists of possible ‘winners’ (those that benefit) and ‘losers’ (those losing suitable climates) among 834 species were published in the Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists’ Society volume 50.

Species projected to be lost from Norfolk with 2°C of warming include the swallowtail butterfly, red-eyed damselfly, garden bumblebee, water vole, Bewick’s swan, pink-footed goose, grey partridge, and snow bunting (among others). Moths are the group projected to be most ‘exposed’ (lose their climate suitability) in Norfolk at this level of warming. However, with increasing levels of warming, Norfolk’s climate becomes more suitable for natterjack toad, migrant hawker, red-veined darter, black-crowned night heron, cattle egret, purple heron, great egret, European spoonbill, black-winged stilt, alpine swift, European bee-eater, and Eurasian hoopoe (among others). Many of these have recently been increasing and/or breeding in Norfolk (and some were in the UK in the past) but these are species one might expect to see with increasing frequency as the climate warms.

Projected impacts on NWT reserves can be broken down into indirect (sea level rise) and direct (changes in temperature and precipitation) effects. Even if warming were held to 1.5°, sea level will continue to rise for several centuries. So, NWT needs to be thinking both about its next 100 years but even beyond that. The Cley reserve complex would be expected to see increases in storm surges first (for which they are preparing with the New Cut) but, over time, the freshwater marshes will become increasingly salty until they are saltmarshes, and over longer periods of time potentially lost entirely. Hickling Broad will face increasing incursions of saltwater potentially changing the nature of the reserve. More directly, winters are likely to become wetter and summers drier. Droughts will become more common. Seasonality will change, with what is seen as typical late summer heat occurring earlier in the summer, but milder winters. This then impacts not only terrestrial biodiversity, but also freshwater biodiversity as rivers and ponds become warmer – with issues like blue-green algae blooms becoming more likely. All reserves will be increasingly impacted with warming levels above 1.5°C, with Hickling and some of the westernmost reserves (the Brecks) potentially being more resilient, but the differences are minor. However, the biodiversity impact on any reserve varies depending on the taxa examined.

However, reserves are not enough

The ecological response to climate change is for species to move, if they can, in response to warming. This means that NWT needs to build on its current nature recovery and landscape plans as it works with other landowners to establish corridors species can move along. While birds, some mammals, and some insects can usually cross small barriers, others will require reserves to be connected by suitable habitats following the same gradient of temperature. Even with corridors, some species will not be able to move at a rate matching the current rate of warming. With warming much above 2°C, and certainly by 3°C, typical adaptation may not be enough; it may be necessary to start thinking about facilitating change to the next ‘habitat type’.

Much has been said in the press about Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), and the assumption for some projects (like the defunct HS2 and the proposed Western Link) that areas can be replaced like for like. Yes, an equivalent area of suitable habitat may be ‘protected’ but that is not a net gain – that habitat was already present. In the case of the old - growth woodlands lost to HS2, those woodlands can NOT be replaced. The trees started growing under a different climate than presently occurs in these areas. It would then take, depending on the species planted, hundreds of years to form an equivalent community – assuming no climate change. With climate change, this is unlikely. The same will be true for trees lost to the Western Link. Trees can’t just be planted, expecting them to turn back into a functioning ecological community. The trees may be there, but they will have lost their mycelial linkages to each other – they will be trees but not a forest, at least not in a reasonable period. After the trees are removed, they are no longer absorbing carbon dioxide and previously stored carbon will start to return to the atmosphere. Given that large trees will be lost, and small trees planted, then as many as 10 times more trees, perhaps more, would need to be planted to make up for the lost carbon removal capability, at least in the short term.

## So, what can you do?

There are many websites and books on actions that individuals can take.

To get started, it may be worth calculating your own personal carbon footprint. Once you have calculated your footprint, you can decide how you can reduce it. You should try to reduce what you can, then offset what you can’t. There are many ways to offset emissions but usually it entails paying small amounts of money for tree planting projects. There are many debates over offsetting, it is not a black-and-white issue, and an entire article could be written about this alone!

Nature likes things messy! While this benefits biodiversity more than climate change, there are small climate change benefits as well. Many mow their lawns too often, cut the grass too short, and use petrol powered mowers. Doubling the time between mowing (e.g., every two weeks rather than every week) can allow short-stemmed flowers in the lawn to bloom, providing nectar for pollinators. The grass grows longer roots and can be more resilient to the more frequent droughts that will occur in Norfolk with increasing levels of warming. The phrase ‘no mow May’ should really be ‘no mow until after May’. This allows flowers to bloom providing nectar to pollinators early in the season before most garden flowers have started to bloom. If one is concerned about providing shorter grass for ground feeders like blackbirds, then mowing a shorter patch surrounded by taller grass can benefit a wider range of species. Also, nature tends to be curved, not straight so a curving short/tall grass transition gives more space for nature. The same can be said for letting leaves collect in some areas to provide shelter and food for animals (and return the nutrients to the soil).

Perhaps in looking for solutions to both emergencies we can consider looking to the past. In the US, settlers used to plant a tree for each child that was born, usually a long-lived, large growing tree. Over successive generations, properties would have trees planted for parents and their children. Instead of cutting down large well-established trees we need to cherish them. For it is not just the carbon stored in the trees, and the habitat and food for many species (especially if the tree is a native oak), but also the carbon in the roots, and mycelial networks connecting the trees together. It is not one tree; it is an entire community being conserved.

### Useful links:

* [wildlifetrusts.org/things-you-can-do-climate-change](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/things-you-can-do-climate-change)
* [footprint.wwf.org.uk](https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/)

# Protecting our peatlands

**Ash Murray, NWT West Norfolk Reserves Manager**

Healthy, functioning peatlands store carbon slowly, but are unique among our habitats in that they do so indefinitely. Protecting peatlands is essential, to prevent them releasing carbon stored over millennia and to ensure that they continue to capture carbon in the future. Healthy peatlands also support some of our rarest flora and fauna.

Maintaining healthy peatlands is no easy task. Climate change is leading to hotter, drier summers and more episodic rainfall events. Drier summers result in the surface layer of peatlands drying out, releasing stored carbon. Rather than soaking into aquifers and replenishing peatlands, shorter and heavier episodes of rainfall lead to more water being lost into rivers.

In addition, burning of fossil fuels and intensive agriculture are leading to increased nitrogen in rainfall. Nitrogen-laden rainfall acts as fertiliser, favouring the growth of vigorous grasses at the expense of slower-growing, peat-forming vegetation, such as bog mosses. Climate change and nitrogen enrichment together lead to peatlands drying out, loss of stored carbon, reduced carbon capture and species loss.

## Peatland restoration on NWT’s west Norfolk reserves

Historically, west Norfolk supported a chain of peatlands running south from Heacham to Downham Market. Most of these have been destroyed over the last 150 years. Only a few examples remain, the most significant being Dersingham Bog, Roydon Common and East Winch Common, but they are still of global importance for the species they support. The dark club, a spindle fungus found at Roydon Common in 2021, has only ever been found at a handful of sites in the UK. Specialist bees, such as the small sandpit mining bee and its parasite the bear-clawed nomad bee, are found only at Roydon Common in Norfolk.

Our peatlands are also hugely important for the birds they support. Roydon Common now ranks as one of the most important sites in lowland England for breeding waders. In 2023, Roydon Common supported five pairs of Eurasian curlew, 24 pairs of lapwing, 11 pairs of snipe and five pairs of redshank. All have increased dramatically on Roydon Common and Tony Hallatt Memorial Reserve in response to habitat restoration here in recent years.

Over the past century, increased nitrogen deposition and warmer, wetter winters have led to a rapid increase in purple moor-grass and common reed on our peatlands. Towering tussocks of purple moor-grass smother lower-growing peatland plants, such as mosses, sedges and liverworts. We have used a range of methods to remove these tussocks in recent decades; striving to achieve the fine balance of removing tussocks, while leaving underlying peat undisturbed. The results are rapid and dramatic. In the spring following stripping, lapwings return and a host of mosses and liverworts start to creep across the surface of the damp peat. Species like greasewort, marsh bryum and the insectivorous oblong-leaved and round-leaved sundews burst into life. At East Winch Common, tussock removal has resulted in an astonishing abundance of petty whin. This rare and declining species in Norfolk was last seen at East Winch in 1988.

Restoration of our peatlands is also dependent on maintaining suitable water flows through the peat. At NWT Tony Hallatt Memorial Reserve and Grimston Warren, we are embarking on an ambitious plan to restore these wetlands, following over a century of damaging drainage. This work, funded by FCC Community Fund as part of the Landfill Communities Fund, will allow us to restore more natural water flows. This mix of restoration initiatives will help to secure the future of our existing peatlands, restore those damaged by past pollution and climate change, and provide thriving reservoirs of peatland species that can help to re-establish damaged peatlands elsewhere in west Norfolk.

## Work of Fens East Peat Partnership

**Matt Jones**

**Wilder Landscapes Manager**

The role that healthy peatland ecosystems play in tackling the climate and biodiversity crises is clear. Yet the majority of peatland sites in lowland England have been drained for agriculture, peat extraction and development. Defra has set a target to initiate restoration of 35,000 hectares of degraded peat by March 2025. To facilitate this ambition, significant funding has been made available through the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme.

One of the most important areas of lowland peat in England is found in The Fens, the low-lying region around The Wash, in south Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and west Norfolk. Once the largest area of wetland habitat in the country, over centuries The Fens have been drained, primarily to exploit the region’s peat soils for farming. The Fens East Peat Partnership (FEPP) has recently been formed. Led by Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, it brings together NWT, Natural England, National Trust, RSPB and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.

Late in 2021, FEPP secured a Discovery Grant from the Peatland Grant Scheme. From January 2022 to August 2023, this allowed partners to undertake investigative work across 20 sites. Work included habitat and species surveys, monitoring of water levels, surveying peat depths and archaeological assessments. During this initial phase, seven Norfolk sites were considered, including Roydon Common and Dersingham Bog.

In May 2023 FEPP applied for a Restoration Grant from the Peatland Grant Scheme, to take forward proposals on the most promising sites. In September 2023 it was confirmed that FEPP was one of 12 successful projects across England, receiving a significant share of the £16 million available.

Work continues at four of the Norfolk sites, all on privately owned land. At the two largest sites, some 200 hectares of farmed or forested land will be taken out of commercial management and restored to create substantial mosaics of reedbed, fen and wet grassland.

Re-wetting these sites and promoting new habitats will support a wide range of fenland plants, invertebrates such as dragonflies and damselflies, water voles and iconic bird species such as crane, bittern and marsh harrier. Just as importantly, these projects will also make a meaningful contribution to our fight against climate change.

# Adapting to climate change on NWT reserves

Bob Morgan, Reserves Officer

**A changing climate has sent nature into flux. With rising sea levels and coastal erosion affecting some of Norfolk’s most precious wildlife reserves, work is underway to replace them inland.**

At NWT Cley and Salthouse Marshes, we have recently completed work intended to protect the site and its wildlife against some of the effects of climate change. The project started as planned in early September, with a team of contractors in diggers and dumper trucks arriving on site.

‘The main focus of the work,’ explains George Baldock, Cley and Salthouse Marshes Warden, ‘has been to restore wetland habitat in the reedbed and realign the Cley New Cut. In the event of flooding, this will enable us to evacuate sea water quickly, via the sluice into the Glaven.’

Rising sea levels and more frequent storm surges have seen Cley and Salthouse Marshes inundated with seawater several times in the last decade. Draining the seawater after these events is vitally important.

Realigned and restored, Cley New Cut will be instrumental to this end. The newly positioned drain should be effective for more than 20 years in protecting precious freshwater habitats from seawater incursion. In significant coastal floods, the drain should function unimpeded by landward movements of shingle.

In addition, work has been carried out to improve parts of the reedbed. The provision of new dykes, the digging of a pseudo-creek and the restoration of a reedbed pool have created habitat for fish and other wetland wildlife, and in turn food for birds such as bitterns.

The project was funded by grants from the Environment Agency Eastern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee and the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, and through generous donations by NWT supporters, including Cley Bird Club and the family of Robert Gillmor. The project also includes the creation and installation of a unique hide-on-wheels overlooking the reserve’s wildlife-rich North Scrape. The design will allow the structure to be towed to safety when a major storm is forecast. North Norfolk experienced strong winds and a high tide shortly after the works were completed, but we were delighted that everything functioned as it should. The realigned New Cut kept saltwater from moving onto our freshwater wildlife habitats. While Cley Marshes will inevitably revert to saltwater habitats in time, as sea level rises, recent work here allows time for the establishment of new freshwater habitat inland, such as our reedbed creation sites at Hickling Broad, Potter Heigham and along the River Wissey.

## Improving our wetlands along the Wissey

On behalf of the Environment Agency, we have also managed the creation of new wetlands by the River Wissey in The Fens. This new reserve is part of a wider project to compensate for future climate-driven losses of freshwater habitats on the Norfolk Coast.

The all-important freshwater is delivered, through various control structures, from the River Wissey into a huge horseshoe-shaped reservoir. This allows control over the rest of the reserve’s water levels, creating optimal conditions year-round for a great diversity of species. The reserve, where around 60,000 reed plugs have been planted, already boasts marsh harrier, water vole, wildfowl and waders.

The success of our reedbed creation at Hickling, Potter Heigham and the Wissey is only the beginning of our development of wetland habitats. Our ambition is to create a large network of connected sites.

# Discover

## Make a date with nature

With spring underway, birds are singing to defend their territories, toads and frogs have made the journey to breeding ponds, and buds of both flowers and leaves are bursting into life. But the question on many people’s lips is, ‘Is spring starting earlier?’

According to observations of nature’s calendar:

* On average, summer migratory birds are arriving in the UK to breed two to three weeks earlier than 30 years ago.
* In the last 50 years, oak leafing has advanced by three weeks.
* Butterflies are being seen earlier in the year and the peak of their appearance is also earlier.

Phenology is the study of the timing of natural seasonal events, such as the first cuckoo in song, the arrival of the first swallow, or the first clump of frogspawn to be seen. Over the last few years phenology has been brought to the forefront by such TV programmes as BBC Springwatch, but Norfolk is in fact the birthplace of phenology.

Robert Marsham, who is seen as the father of phenology, lived in Stratton Strawless in Norfolk. Between 1736 and his death in 1798 he recorded certain wildlife events. His family continued his work, giving us approximately 200 years of priceless information on seasonal British wildlife. Phenology was once seen as a relatively unimportant pastime of the amateur naturalist, but, as our climate changes fast, it is now understood to be a hugely important way of monitoring how species are adapting.

This March, April and May we would like you to look out for three indicators of spring in Norfolk:

* Orange-tip butterflies
* Flowering hawthorn
* Flowering horse chestnut

## Species focus: orange-tip butterfly

These pretty little butterflies are easy to spot as the males’ wings have bright orange tips – giving them their name. They are a common sight in spring and can be found in meadows, woodland and hedges. Females lay their eggs on garlic mustard, cuckooflower and hedge mustard.

### How to identify

The male orange-tip is unmistakable. He is a white butterfly with light grey wingtips and half of his forewing bold orange. The female is also white, but she has grey-black wingtips and is similar to white butterflies. Both sexes show a distinctive mottled, mossy grey pattern on the undersides of their hindwings.

### Did you know?

Orange-tip caterpillars are cannibals, eating their own eggshells when they emerge and moving on to eat other orange-tip eggs nearby. Caterpillars pupate in July and overwinter as pupae, emerging as butterflies the following spring.

## Log your sightings

Keep your eyes peeled and please submit your records online by visiting:

[norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/spottersurvey](https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/spottersurvey)

# Explore

## Woods to explore in spring

In early spring the drab brown of our woods is suddenly splashed with patches of brilliant white and cheerful yellow. Wood anemones carpet sunny banks, wood sorrel crowds around tree stumps and primroses sprinkle the edges of footpaths and rides. In mid-April the pixie-hat flowers of bluebells start to rise from the green sea of their long slender leaves. By the month’s close the emerald floor is transformed by a wash of indigo. Bluebell woods are uniquely British, as the centuries-long absence of wild boar has allowed these beautiful carpets to develop undisturbed in our mature woods.

Norfolk has a number of ancient woods that are fantastic for bluebells and other woodland flowers. Spring is a wonderful time to visit, as the plants hurry to flower before they are shaded out by the trees’ closing canopy. Here are three NWT woods you may wish to visit this spring:

### Lower wood, Ashwellthorpe

This magnificent ancient wood is recorded in the Domesday Book and is particularly noted for its veteran oak trees. Alongside the bluebells that carpet the understory in spring, wild garlic is also common, giving off its unmistakable aroma. Other plants include wood anemone, wood spurge, herb-paris, common twayblade, and a profusion of early purple orchids. More than 200 species of fungi have also been recorded here.

### Thursford Wood

Thursford Wood holds some of the oldest oak trees in Norfolk. It is thought that some of the trees here are over 500 years old. The wood has an excellent display of spring bluebells, with wood anemone and wood sorrel found here too. A path runs down to the River Stiffkey and, as the woodland descends into alder carr, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage can be found close to stands of yellow flag iris.

### Wayland Wood

This ancient wood is carefully managed by NWT through rotational coppicing. There is evidence that this kind of traditional woodland management has taken place here since the 10th century. The wood is very atmospheric and is the alleged site of the Babes in the Wood legend. Wayland is one of the largest woods in south Norfolk and holds a fine mix of tree species including hazel, bird cherry and hornbeam. Alongside swathes of bluebells, over 125 species of flowering plant have been recorded here, including yellow archangel, early purple orchid, common twayblade and the rare yellow star-of-Bethlehem. Wayland Wood is the only site in Norfolk (and one of very few in East Anglia) where this pretty yellow plant occurs. It flowers in March, preferring shady areas in the southeast corner of the wood.

### How to find these woods

For directions to these three NWT woods, please visit [norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/reserves](https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/reserves)

# Take action

## Ryburgh Wildlife Group’s 25th anniversary

In the summer of 2023 Ryburgh Wildlife Group celebrated its 25th anniversary. It was established when the Sennowe Estate kindly allowed the development of a small village nature reserve and hide on wet meadow and pasture in the Wensum floodplain. Over 70 households from Great Ryburgh and surrounding villages are members of the group. Nick Parsons tells us more:

In 2014 members planted a Community Woodland on an unused part of the village playing fields. The wood has native trees and shrubs with paths and a picnic area. It is well used by the village. Other areas of the playing field have been rewilded and native plants, including greater stitchwort, self-heal, red campion and even betony, are gaining ground.

Despite our successes, we are facing ecological and climate emergencies and our village is sadly not immune. We have lost many species of birds and plants over the last 20 years. So, in 2020 we decided to broaden our focus to wildlife throughout the village and the surrounding area.

One of our first projects was assisting a hedgehog survey in the Upper Wensum Valley. We then turned a redundant and isolated piece of farmland into a meadow, now bordered by thick, untamed hedges. Our latest effort is the Pollinator Pathway. We are encouraging folk to grow more insect-friendly plants in their gardens. To help in this, we have given away free bulbs and are building a network of bug hotels.

Recognising that together we are stronger, we have begun projects with the neighbouring villages of Stibbard and Colkirk. We would like to build a relationship with other like-minded village and amenity groups, to share ideas for protecting Norfolk nature. If you are interested, please contact us at [ryburghwildlifegroup@gmail.com](mailto:ryburghwildlifegroup@gmail.com)

## Workshops for a Wilder Community

Norfolk Wildlife Trust has designed a programme of walks, talks and workshops to support individuals, communities, parish councils and landowners acting for nature in their local area.

So if you want to find out how to create a meadow or restore a pond; learn how to grab a grant for a wildlife project or be inspired by a community taking action for programme, then look no further.

To view the programme [norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/events](https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/events) or request a brochure by emailing [wild@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:wild@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk)

# Gardening

## Grow a delicious herb garden

Words by Arit Anderson.

**Arit Anderson** is a garden designer, writer, podcaster and presenter for Gardeners World. She is also a trustee for the National Garden Scheme, Patron for Tuppeny Barn and Cultivate London, and an Ambassador for the RHS.

**Herbs have been used around the world for their medicinal and edible qualities for millennia, estimated at 60,000 years ago!**

In the 6th century St Benedict drew up plans for how the monastic community should be laid out, which of course included a garden. This had to contain everything to sustain the life of the monks, and whilst the kitchen garden provided the food, the physic garden would contain all of the medicinal herbs. Those were the medicines in those days!

Not only are herbs great for us, but they also attract wildlife to gardens. Most people think of herbs for seasoning food, which of course they are excellent at doing. So, when I’m asked, ‘which herbs should I grow?’ invariably I reply, ‘the ones you like to eat’! And that’s the best place to start, as many herbs are better when they are repeatedly picked or cut, as they shoot new leaves, which are more flavoursome and potent than older leaves.

Herbs can be grown very easily in small spaces, indoors in a pot on a windowsill, or outside in a window box, and adding more than one will widen your culinary additions. But do make sure the chosen plants like the same soil, water and light conditions.

An expert herb grower, Jekka McVicar, mainly grows her herbs in raised beds, easier on the back when gardening, but also means she can control the soil conditions and can contain those herbs that like to spread. If you only have a border but want to grow something like lemon balm that will quickly spread everywhere, put it in a large bottomless pot that will restrict the roots.

Herbs are a gateway plant to get people, especially children, gardening as they are easy to grow. And alongside this they attract bees, butterflies, moths, birds and other beneficial insects into the garden, so it’s win win. There’s not much else I like better than to take a hot cup of water into the garden and pick my own tea!

### Recommended herbs

#### **Wild marjoram**

Otherwise called oregano, it’s a fantastic plant. Best in well-drained soil, bees and butterflies love it and it’s great for flavouring Mediterranean dishes!

#### **Fennel**

Keep in light well drained sandy soil. Great for hoverflies and ladybirds and once they go to seed, birds can feed on them from autumn. One of my favourites.

#### **Mint**

Thrives in most soils, it’s so easy to grow and its flowers attracts bees, moths, butterflies and other pollinators. A hardworking herb that lifts salads, sauces and drinks! Loves to spread out – so contain in a pot if you don’t want a garden full.

#### **Lavender**

A sunny spot on well-drained soil is best. Bees and butterflies can’t keep away! I had my first lavender scone on the Isle of Wight and it was delicious!

#### **Borage**

Copes with most soils and dappled shade and is a magnet to many pollinators. Borage flowers look super impressive captured in ice and served in drinks.

#### **Thyme**

Thrives in sun and well-drained soil and flowers throughout the summer, making this a popular herb with pollinators. With so many varieties to choose from, they’re great for cooking.

#### **Lemon balm**

Spreads easily so it is best to keep it in a container. Renowned for attracting bees and I grow this for making herbal tea.

#### **Chives**

A moist but well drained soil will keep chives happy, who in turn when flowering will keep many of our bees happy. The flowers are edible and look decorative in salads.

### Coronation Gardens for Food & Nature

For information and advice on growing delicious herbs and wildlife-friendly fruit and vegetables in your garden, visit [mycoronationgarden.org](https://mycoronationgarden.org/)

# Learn with Tern

## Herons, bittern, egrets, spoonbills and ibises

**Words by Nick Acheson, Norfolk Wildlife Trust Ambassador**

Many readers will remember a time – just 35 years ago – when only one member of the heron family, or Ardeidae, bred commonly in Norfolk, and indeed the UK: the grey heron, known in the Norfolk dialect as harnser. A second member of the family, the bittern, or great bittern, was vanishingly rare as a British breeding bird and most of its tiny remnant population lived in Norfolk reedbeds. No other herons bred in the UK.

Happily, thanks to research and conservation action led by the RSPB, the bittern has rebounded and the males’ sonorous booms may be heard in spring wherever there are suitable reedbeds. Norfolk remains a stronghold.

At the time of the bittern’s near demise, the swift colonisation of Norfolk by Europe’s three breeding egret species was almost unimaginable. Even the little egret remained a very rare bird here in the 1980s. Since then, assisted by human-led climate change, it has colonised the UK so surely that it has become omnipresent in coastal wetlands. The great egret has been slower to colonise and remains far scarcer today, though it now breeds at a number of Norfolk wetlands and may be seen anywhere across the county. Of our three egrets, the cattle egret has surely effected the most dramatic climate-assisted colonisation. Even 10 years ago, a Norfolk cattle egret was a very rare bird. Today, though cattle egrets are still extremely rare as breeding birds, flocks of more than 20 are often seen in the county. In southern England roosts of cattle egrets number in the hundreds, a sight we can expect to see in Norfolk very soon. It is possible that black-crowned night herons, purple herons and even little bitterns will become established as Norfolk-breeding birds in the coming years, as climate change accelerates.

In the allied family Threskiornithidae, which includes ibises and spoonbills, two species have recently become greatly more common in Norfolk. The spoonbill – technically Eurasian spoonbill – is known to have bred in East Anglia until the Middle Ages. Its impressive return – first to Holkham NNR and now to other Norfolk sites, including our own Hickling Broad and Marshes – has no doubt been partly in response to wetland management and creation. However, echoing a trend on the Continent, it is likely that it was largely driven by climate change.

As for the handsome glossy ibis, it too was an extremely rare bird in living memory but has become far commoner over the past 10 years. In 2022 the species bred for the first time in the UK, at a site in Cambridgeshire. With Norfolk’s colonies of herons, egrets and spoonbills growing and becoming more diverse, and with our climate changing fast, it seems likely that glossy ibises will also soon join the list of birds found breeding here.

# Get Involved

## Welcoming new trustees

**Trustees play a critical role at Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Together with our senior leadership team, they share ultimate responsibility for directing how we are run. Two new trustees were elected at our last AGM, Kathy Gill and Mandy Loadman, and we are delighted to have them on board.**

Kathy manages national teams of specialists at Natural England, contributing evidence to conservation projects across England and providing policy advice to the government on the environment. She also has significant experience as Strategy Director of an international environmental volunteering NGO and is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. ‘I’ve worked in conservation for over 20 years, but despite being from Norfolk much of my work has been elsewhere. I’m really looking forward to applying my knowledge here – a county I know and love.’

Mandy brings 36 years’ experience in financial services, specialising in programme delivery and digital. She has always had a passion for nature and enjoys attracting wildlife to the garden and taking early morning local walks. ‘I see Norfolk Wildlife Trust as such an important organisation, driving research, education, and preservation. I hope to get the opportunity to use my skill set to support the trust in taking its strategy forward and I am sure to grow personally from the experience.’

## Emma Turner at Hickling

The pioneering bird photographer and ornithologist Emma Turner (1867–1940) inspired a broad audience with her lively books and photographs. Working at a time when it was men who dominated both photography and natural history, Emma Turner was a remarkable woman, and one whose approach to photography set the standard for so much of what has followed. Turner had a particular association with Hickling and the Broads, not only writing about the landscape and its wildlife, but also capturing rare breeding birds through her photographs and in notes published in scientific journals.

Eighty years after her death, we are celebrating Emma Turner’s contributions and her association with Hickling through an exhibition and events at NWT Hickling Broad and Marshes. The exhibition will also bring part of the Emma Turner Archive, held by the British Trust for Ornithology in Thetford, to Hickling so that visitors can learn more about her contribution. James Parry, author of Emma Turner’s biography, will give a talk on her life and work at Hickling on Friday 26 April, and the exhibition itself will run from Friday 19 April until Sunday 19 May.

More details can be found at: [norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/events](https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/events)

## Would you like to become an NWT Trustee?

Can you help us to create more space for nature to thrive and inspire more people to take action for nature?

We are looking for people who are passionate about Norfolk’s wildlife and who want to make a difference. You don’t need to have experience on a Trustee Board or understand all the formalities of being a Trustee. We can offer you a full induction, mentoring, training and expenses. In exchange you would offer new ideas, a commitment of time to attend meetings, and be willing to learn more about being a Trustee and the work of Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

We would be particularly interested in hearing from anyone who has experience/background in:

* fundraising
* finance
* planning
* law
* communication and engagement strategies incorporating multiple stakeholder groups
* the farming community

If you are interested, or just want to find out more, please contact our Governance Officer, Marion Riches on [governance@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:governance@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk)

# From the President

Words by Patrick Barkham, natural history writer and NWT President

I was browsing the EDP’s headlines the other morning. The top 10 most-read stories included the following:

**–Coastal car park could close in WEEKS as nearby cliff s crumble**

**–Norfolk Broads pub forced into temporary closure AGAIN due to flooding**

**–Soil wall built to try to stop repeated flooding on A47**

**–Bridge IS linked to Broads floods as documents reveal risk**

It reminded me of an obvious but overlooked fact: we are living with climate change today.

The public debate around climate change usually focuses on questions for the future. How can we reach Net Zero carbon emissions by 2050? How will our children cope with extreme heat and violent storms? Can the world adapt quickly enough to the climate crisis?

These are big, daunting, distant questions. They don’t necessarily inspire great hope or immediate action.

But actually, of course, Norfolk life today is already changing because of global heating.

Everyone who visits the coast from Holme to Happisburgh to Hemsby can see coastal erosion – worsened by sea level rise and increased storminess. Older residents tell us they haven’t seen river floods like those of autumn 2023 in their lifetimes. Every farmer says that floods and droughts are becoming more prolonged and more extreme.

Those EDP headlines tell of society’s struggle to take wise, long-term decisions that meet the challenges of a rapidly changing climate. How can we adapt more quickly and more smoothly? Ask a farmer – or a naturalist. Farmers and nature reserve managers are already taking long-term, climate-aware decisions – because they have to.

Both farmers and naturalists know that nature is our ally. How can we stop towns flooding? Make more space for floodwater in valley bottoms by restoring drained fields that quickly eject rainwater into streams as porous meadows and woods that hold water. In certain places, beavers can help. If our valleys hold more water, we become more drought-resistant in summer too.

How can we stop coastal erosion? Salt marshes are superb at dissipating wave-energy; the more natural we can make our coastlines, the more resilient they will be.

We rightly worry that other species won’t adapt quickly enough to climate change. Parts of the Broads will become salty within our lifetimes; these new salt marshes won’t sustain unique flora and fauna, from milk parsley to the swallowtail.

If we want to keep these natural icons in Norfolk, we must make space for new freshwater marshes further up river valleys, and further inland. Happily, these water-absorbent new places for nature will help protect us from floods too.

As champions of nature in Norfolk, we rightly ask how we can help the wild world survive under global heating. But we must also spread the word that as much as we can assist the natural world, it will always help us more. A wilder Norfolk is our best hope for coping with climate change right now, and in the future.