

Top 10

Here are the 'Top Ten' species to spot during our centenary year. All are celebrated as conservation successes for the county and can be seen, with patience, on at least one of our reserves.

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1.

Swallowtail butterfly

Papilio machaon britannicus

Brief overview

The UK's largest butterfly, it is very colourful, and arguably our most beautiful. Formerly restricted across the Norfolk Broads but starting to widen its distribution. Exclusive to tall-herb fen reedbeds.

Where and when to see them:

NWT Hickling Broad, Upton Fen and Ranworth Broad in late May to June.

Conservation status and management:

Habitat loss and butterfly collectors initially caused the species to decline. However, better protection, education, habitat improvement and reedbed creation work has increased its population over the last 100 years. Although, due to its limited UK geographical range and low population, it remains a threatened butterfly. The caterpillar of this butterfly feeds exclusively on milk parsley, an equally rare plant of East Anglian reedbeds.

© Steve Evans

Where and when to see them:

NWT Hickling Broad. Can be seen all year, but early spring best to hear booming males.

Conservation status and management:

The bittern became extinct in the UK, but in the early 20th century returned to breed at Hickling Broad and Marshes nature reserve. Its numbers have fluctuated since then, nearly becoming extinct as a breeding bird in the 1970s. Recent habitat improvements and reedbed creation have seen numbers and distribution around the UK significantly improve.



3.

Silver-studded blue

Plebejus argus

Brief overview

A small, but dazzling, butterfly, which gets its name from the reflective 'stud's (scales) found on the underside of the hindwings. The upper wings of the male are shimmering blue with a dark outer rim. The female is chocolate brown, often with a hint of blue at the base of the wings.

Where and when to see them:

It is a rare butterfly found in heathland habitats that have shorter, sparsely vegetated areas. NWT Buxton Heath is a good place to spot from June up until late August.

Conservation status and management:

Despite once disappearing from Norfolk, a successful re-introduction project has seen it thriving on several of the county's heathlands. Buxton Heath is one of the best UK sites for the species.



2.

Eurasian bittern

Botaurus stellaris

Brief overview

A streaky brown heron that is more often heard than seen. Hiding deep in the reed beds, it delivers a loud far-carrying 'booming' call. Breeds in large stands of reed.



100
YEARS

Use the tick boxes to keep track of the species you have seen!



4.

Norfolk hawker

Aeshna isosceles

Brief overview

A large brown dragonfly with clear wings. It is the only UK dragonfly with green eyes. Originally restricted to the Norfolk Broads but has recently widened its range.

Where and when to see them:

All NWT Broadland reserves. On the wing June / July.

Conservation status and management:

Today, this dragonfly is more common than a few decades ago and can even be found in small garden ponds. Better water quality and climate change may be factors for its increase.



5.

Fen orchid

Liparis loeselii

Brief overview

A small, waxy green orchid. The flowers are pale yellow-green, spiky with a tongue-shaped lip. Growing in moss and flowering in June, this orchid requires a particular type of poor fen.

Where and when to see them:

NWT Upton Fen. Please remain on the paths and observe only plants marked out by staff.

Conservation status and management:

From only a few dozen flowering plants, the annual count is now in the thousands. The careful conservation management of its favoured sites, including translocation projects, has seen the fen orchid expand its range, as well as its population.

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Top 10. How many can you spot?

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Page 1 of 2

6.

Common crane

Grus grus

Brief overview

The UK's tallest bird has long legs and a long neck, with powder-grey plumage and a distinctive black, white, and red head. It favours undisturbed marshes and fens and prefers reedbeds for nesting.

Where and when to see them:

NWT Hickling Broad. All year round, best observed from Raptor Roost Watch Point.

Conservation status and management:

The common crane was driven to extinction in the UK many hundreds of years ago. Since its surprise return as a breeding bird to the Norfolk Broads in the 1980s, it has made a steady recovery and can now be found across the East of England. A breeding and release programme in the Somerset Levels has helped boost the population.

7.

Milk parsley

Peucedanum palustre

Brief overview

Belonging to the umbellifer (carrot) family, its green leaves resemble carrot tops. The plant flowers from July to September producing clusters of small white flowers.

Where and when to see them:

It can be found across all NWT Broadland reserves, but alongside boardwalks at NWT Hickling Broad is a particularly good place to look.

Conservation status and management:

Drainage in the 19th century and scrub invasion in the 20th century restricted the plant's prime habitat. Reedbed creation and a return to traditional reed harvesting has seen an increase in its population. However, mildew / fungal disease is currently having a detrimental effect at some sites. Milk parsley is the food plant of the swallowtail butterfly.

8.

Stone curlew

Burhinus oedicnemus

Brief overview

Although a wader, it is not related to true curlews; it has a short bill and belongs to the 'thick-knee' family. 'Stonies' are pigeon-sized birds, with brown and sandy plumage that forms excellent camouflage. Its large yellow eyes are useful for a predominantly nocturnal lifestyle.

Where and when to see them:

NWT Weeting Heath has been, for decades, the go-to place for birdwatchers to see this strange bird. April through to August.

Conservation status and management:

The stone curlew suffered population decline as agricultural practices became more mechanised and intensive. They have remained a conservation challenge due to nest predation and habitat loss; however, the population appears to be holding steady.

9.

Marsh harrier

Circus aeruginosus

Brief overview

A raptor with a long tail and broad wings. The male has streaked brown plumage with grey wing panels and black tips. The female is chocolate brown with a cream-coloured head

Where and when to see them:

Formally only a summer visitor, the marsh harrier can now be found year-round. It can often be spotted over large stretches of reedbed. Our Raptor Roost at Hickling Broad nature reserve offers great views of marsh harrier in winter.

Conservation status and management:

A hundred years ago only a handful of marsh harriers bred, confined to the Norfolk Broads. It is now found right across eastern and southern England, with recent breeding success in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

10.

Fen mason wasp

Odynerous simillimus

Brief overview

A solitary wasp with a shiny black body and distinctive ivory marks on its shoulders and abdomen. Found in fens and marshy areas, it requires dry, compacted bare and exposed ground to build its characteristic tunnels with 'chimneys' at the entrance.

Where and when to see them:

Pathways seem to be the most popular locations, so care must be taken to discover and protect the colonies. Spot this species at NWT Hickling Broad and Marshes in June and July.

Conservation status and management:

A rare solitary wasp that was thought to be extinct in Britain, until its rediscovery in the Norfolk Broads in 1986. Its population has grown, but it is still largely concentrated in the Broads, although fen mason wasps have been found along the coast of Suffolk and Essex.