

FREE!

CUCKOO
POSTER



**BIRD
BUCCANEERS**

Find some fearsome
feathered pirates

**INDEPENDENT
INSECTS**

Meet the bees
that buzz alone



Issue 101 Spring 2022

Wildlife Watch

MAGAZINE

THE EEL DEAL

These thin fish
make incredible
journeys!

What's that smell?



Discover some weird and whiffy wildlife



The
Wildlife
Trusts



Editor's corner

TOM HIBBERT
Editor, Wildlife Watch

Are you ready for spring? I know I am! I love winter and all its wonderful wildlife, but there's something so special about the arrival of spring – it's a magical time.

One of the best things about spring is that so many incredible insects appear. There are loads of beetles, butterflies and bees to be discovered! In this issue, we're taking a look at solitary bees and how they find a place to nest. Turn to page 18 to find out more.

We're also introducing some of my favourite birds: the skuas. Have you heard of them? They're fast, ferocious and fearless pirates of the sky – I think you're going to love them! You can find out all about them on page 12.

With these and so many other amazing animals to discover, I hope you have a spectacular spring!

Tom



GET IN TOUCH

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Website: WildlifeWatchUK

WILD THINGS

News from our Wildlife Watchers



BRILLIANT BEAVERS

Albie (aged 6) from Somerset visited the Cornwall Beaver Project and saw a family of beavers and the amazing dam they have built! He learnt all about how beavers help prevent floods and make habitat for other wildlife.



FUNGI FINDERS

Six-year-old Rowan from Manchester (below) explored some new areas of nature and found these fabulous fungi! And Molly, also 6, from Flintshire (below right) spotted these towering toadstools on a path near her house.



Cover credit

In all our excitement at our 100th issue, we forgot to thank **Rachel Hudson Illustration** for the beautiful background on the front cover. It's gorgeous, don't you think!



Leafcutter bee © Jon Hawkins / Surrey Hills Photography

18



Pomarine skua © Pete Richman

Sphagnum moss © Mark Hamblin / 2020/ISSN

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06

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WILDLIFE WATCH 101

Editor: Tom Hibbert

Editorial Team: Ashleigh Carter, Charlotte Varella, Joanna Richards, Leanne Smart, Mike Watson



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What's Wildlife Watch?

Wildlife Watch is the junior branch of The Wildlife Trusts. Join Wildlife Watch and start your nature adventure. Prices range from £10-£24 per year for child-only membership and £30-£60 for family membership.

You'll receive a starter pack and four issues of Wildlife Watch magazine a year. This is

packed full of amazing pictures, posters and competitions. We also have a really wild website and e-newsletter full of wild ideas and nature-spotting tips. Plus you get access to local events and groups. Go to wildlifewatch.org.uk to find out more.

KEEP WATCHING!

The Science Section

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In every issue this year we'll be bringing you a fact-packed science section, sharing recent discoveries about weird and wonderful wildlife and explaining the meaning of some scientific words.



WILD WORDS

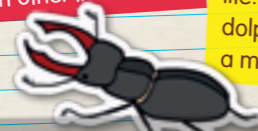
Impress your friends with new words from the world of wildlife science!

PELAGIC (pe-lā-jik)

Pelagic just means 'relating to the open sea'. Pelagic animals are ones that spend most of their time out on the open sea, well away from land. They could be on or over the water, like pelagic birds, or in the water, like pelagic fish.

OVIPOSITOR (oh-vih-poz-ih-tur)

A tube-like organ that some animals, especially insects, use to lay eggs. They can be spiky for stabbing into the ground, or even other insects!



MAMMALS (mam-mulls)

Mammals is the name for the group of species that are warm-blooded, have a backbone, feed their young with milk, and have either hair or fur at some point in their life. Humans, mice, dogs and dolphins are all examples of a mammal.

RECENT DISCOVERIES

SEAL SOUNDS



© Margaret Holland

In noisy places, animals often raise their voice and make louder sounds to increase their chances of being heard. Some animals go a step further – they actually change their tone of voice to be heard above the background noise. Scientists haven't found many mammals that can do this, but a recent experiment suggested that baby common seals may have this special ability.

The scientists recorded the calls of eight common seal pups, which were being

looked after by a rescue centre. They also played recordings of wind noise, to see how the pups' calls would change when the wind was louder. They found that when there was a lot of noise, the pups actually lowered the tone of their voice. It's thought this might help their voices carry further in noisy conditions. The ability to judge the level of background noise and change their voice in response seems to be quite rare in mammals, making these seals super special!

THE TRAVELLING TURTLE

A Kemp's ridley sea turtle was found stranded on a beach in Wales, 4,000 miles away from its usual home in the Gulf of Mexico! The turtle, nicknamed Tally because it was found on Talacre beach, was taken into care by experts from Anglesey

Sea Zoo. They hope to help the turtle recover and fly it back to Mexico, where the seas are warm enough for it to survive. Kemp's ridleys are the smallest and most endangered sea turtles in the world, with only around 8,000 nesting females left.



© Anglesey Sea Zoo

Follow Tally's recovery on Twitter @angleseyseazoo

THANK YOU to Faith!

YOUR STORIES

A feather duster in the tree

by Faith, aged 10



One November morning away from the hustle and bustle,
I tiptoe quietly though the woods and hear a gentle rustle.
I look all around then up to the sky,
Then I see it, a squirrel with a glint in her eye.

She shuffles slowly down to the ground,
Her feather duster tail sweeping round and round.
One final leap onto a leafy bed,
From there I see her tiny ears twitch on her head.

Oh no – she has seen me, to the spot I freeze,
She looks at me suspiciously, her eyes like onyx beads.
Then she creeps a little closer and I think I see her smile,
Then with a tilt of her head she says,
“Stay and watch me for a while.”

I follow her as she leads me to the stump of a tree,
Where she looks around checking no other squirrel eyes can see.
Then she digs and she digs into the soft, green moss,
Her tail waving wildly like a stick of candy floss.

Her little claws move quickly flinging dust and dirt.
She must find her goodies quickly before another finds it first.
Then at last with a flurry, she holds up her prize.
She's found a treasured nut she left here last time.

She holds it in her mouth and dances with glee,
Her short, furry arms waving happily.
Then with a bow, she says goodbye,
And she scurries to her treetop home, way up in the sky.

Do you want to write for the magazine? Send your stories and ideas to watch@wildlifetrusts.org!

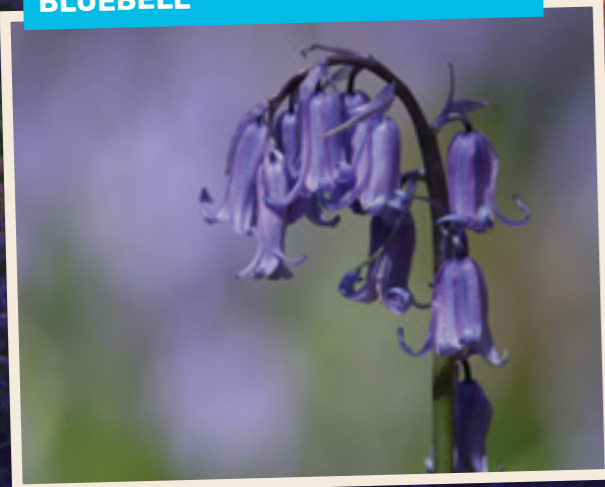
WOODLAND WILDFLOWERS

by Max Lawson

Our woodlands are home to an amazing variety of plants, animals and fungi. Spring is an excellent time to see the (sometimes) hidden stars of the show – wildflowers!

HERE ARE **SIX SPECIES** TO SPOT THIS SPRING...

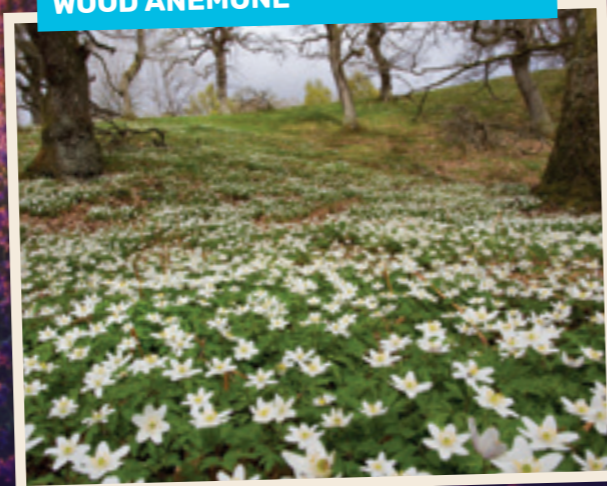
BLUEBELL



The beautiful bluebell has bell-shaped flowers which are a deep violet-blue colour and the plant usually leans to one side. Bluebells are abundant in the UK, and in spring you can often see huge numbers of these beautiful flowers covering woodland floors like a colourful carpet. Did you know ants help to spread bluebell seeds? So, if you live near a bluebell woodland you may find them popping up in your garden!

Wood anemones are often pollinated by hoverflies!

WOOD ANEMONE



Wood anemones have star-shaped, six-petalled white flowers with a cluster of bright yellow stamens in the middle. Like bluebells, wood anemones are often seen carpeting the floor of old woodlands but can also be found in some parks and gardens. The wood anemone is an ancient woodland indicator plant – so if you spot this flower while you're out exploring, it's possible that you're standing in a very old and special habitat!

LESSER CELANDINE



The lesser celandine is a small yellow flower that typically has 8-12 petals, making it look like a pointier buttercup. It has glossy, heart-shaped leaves on long stalks. Lesser celandine grows in clusters and loves damp woodland paths, as well as stream banks and ditches. It was once thought that you could use lesser celandine to predict the weather because they close their petals before raindrops fall!

There are around 1,600 species of wildflower in the UK!

WILD GARLIC



Wild garlic has long oval-shaped leaves, which have smooth edges and end in a point. The flowers have six white petals and grow in a cluster at the end of a long, thin stalk. Wild garlic often grows in dense clumps carpeting the woodland floor, especially in old woodlands. You can also find it along hedgerows and in scrubby habitats. You can usually tell when there is wild garlic nearby from the strong scent of garlic in the forest air!

Wild boars like to dig up and eat the bulbs of wild garlic!

COMMON DOG VIOLET



The common dog violet has heart-shaped leaves and purple flowers with five petals – two at the top, three at the bottom. Unlike some other types of violet, it doesn't have a scent. Common dog violets are found in a range of habitats from woodlands to grasslands and hedgerows. This plant is very important for several fritillary butterflies, such as the silver-washed fritillary, because they lay their eggs on it.

WOOD SORREL



Wood sorrel is a pretty white flower with five petals that are all lined with pink veins. Each leaf is composed of three small heart-shaped segments, which fold up at night or when it rains. Wood sorrel can be found in woodlands, hedgerows and usually moist shaded habitats throughout the UK. One of the most exciting things about wood sorrel is that when it's finished flowering, the seed heads can explode! When they're touched, they burst and seeds shoot out.

I'm Max and I work on London Wildlife Trust's Great North Wood project, protecting south London's patches of ancient woodland and all the amazing species that live there.



Bluebell woodland © Guy Edwardes / 2020VISION

© Vaughn Matthews

© Mark Hamblin / 2020VISION

© Philip Preedy

© Tom Hibbert

© Ross Hindrott / 2020VISION

© Chris Gomersall / 2020VISION

As winter melts into spring, our wildlife begins to wake up in the warmer temperatures. Buds appear on the trees and shoots come up from the ground, but it's not just the plants getting ready for spring. Many animals are stirring from their winter hibernation.

LET'S MEET SOME OF THE ANIMALS STIRRING THIS SPRING!

SPRINGING TO LIFE

by Sara Booth-Card

WHAT IS HIBERNATION?

We tend to think of hibernation as a deep sleep, but that's not quite right. Hibernation is when an animal goes into a dormant state for a long period of time. A dormant state is when a creature's body slows down. It stops moving around, its heart beats less often, it takes fewer breaths, and its body temperature cools. This helps animals save energy, so they don't need to keep eating to make enough energy to survive. This is really useful in winter, when food can be hard to find!

The word hibernation is often used to describe any animal that spends the winter like this, but there are actually different types of dormant state. They all have the same purpose though – saving energy! Some creatures even go into a short-term version of hibernation called torpor, to survive cold nights or a brief spell of bad weather.

BROWN LONG-EARED BATS

Brown long-eared bats are one of my favourite species that hibernate over winter. After spending the summer and autumn fattening up on midges and moths, they tuck into tree holes and tiny nooks and crannies in old buildings, then hibernate from November to April. Can you imagine not having your favourite food for that long?! After they've stirred from hibernation in spring, females gather in groups known as maternity roosts. In summer, they give birth to a single pup, which is able to look after itself after about six weeks.

Brown long-eared bats can hear the sound of insects walking!



Sara Booth-Card
I'm the Nature Friendly Schools Coordinator for Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (I'm an ecologist and teacher!) and I love getting people excited about wildlife, especially wildflowers and invertebrates!



COMMON FROG

Common frogs spend the winter hiding in the mud at the bottom of a pond, or tucked away under logs and rocks. If the weather isn't too bad, they may come out to find food. As soon as frogs have started to get active again, they're eager to find the nearest pond so they can spawn (lay their eggs). Frogs have even been known to spawn in December! Spawning this early is risky, as the eggs won't survive any really cold weather. Have you seen any frogspawn yet this year?



PEACOCK BUTTERFLY

Insects can hibernate too, but their form of hibernation is called diapause – they basically push pause on their lifecycle! Most butterflies hibernate as pupae, but peacock butterflies spend the winter as adults hidden in dark spaces. Because of this, they have a head start on the other butterflies when spring arrives! Peacock butterflies are one of the first butterflies you're likely to see each year, flying around parks and gardens as they search for flowers to feed on. When they've warmed up and had some food, they'll be looking to mate and lay eggs. They usually place their eggs on nettle leaves, as that's the caterpillar's favourite food.



Peacock butterflies can lay clusters of up to 500 eggs!

PEATLANDS

by Jenny Bennion



I'm **Jenny** from Lancashire Wildlife Trust and I love peatlands! My favourite thing is visiting the bogs and touching the soft, soggy mosses.



Sphagnum moss © Ross Hoddinett / 2020VISION

What are peatlands?

Peatlands are a really special type of wet, boggy habitat – in fact they are often known as bogs. The UK has lots of peatlands. Blanket bogs can be found on many of our uplands, hills and moors. Lowland raised peat bogs and fens are found on lower ground closer to sea level.

What makes peatlands so special is that they are wet and very acidic. This means that as the plants on peatlands naturally die, they do not fully decompose (rot away) and instead form layers of peat. Peat forms very slowly at only 1mm a year!

What wildlife lives there?

Peatlands are home to loads of amazing and often rare wildlife. There are lots of insects, rare birds, and plenty of special plants. Some of the most important plants on peatlands are sphagnum mosses. These are small plants with no roots that come in lots of different colours, including green, red and yellow. It's these plants that break down over many years to form the peat itself.

You can also find carnivorous, insect-eating plants on peatlands! Sundews are tiny plants with little tendrils on their leaves, each tipped with a sticky droplet. When insects fly past, they get stuck to the droplets. The sundew then releases a chemical that turns the insect into a disgusting kind of insect soup, which the plant digests!

Can they help fight the climate crisis?

Yes! When they are looked after, peatlands are able to absorb carbon from the atmosphere locking it away in their peaty soils. However, over 80 per cent of UK peatlands have been damaged by draining the water off them, digging them up and planting trees on them. When this happens all that carbon can get released, actually making the climate crisis worse! But we are working hard to restore our peatlands so that they can start helping us fight the climate crisis again.

How can we help them?

Globally lots of peatlands get destroyed and dug up so that the peat can be used to make compost that people use in their gardens or to grow potted plants. Ask your parents, and any other grown up you can, to make sure they buy peat-free compost and plants. By making the switch you will help to save these precious habitats and our planet!

Bogs are as acidic as pickled onions!

Globally peatlands store twice as much carbon as forests!



Round-leaved sundew © Brian Eberstam



© Lancashire Wildlife Trust

I spy...

Damselflies, like this blue-tailed damselfly, have enormous eyes to help them spot food and grab it in mid-air!



© Ross Hoddinett / 2020VISION

SKY PIRATES

by
Pete
Dommett

© Peter Cairns / 2020VISION



Meet the bandits of the bird world! Skuas are ocean-going buccaneers that steal edible loot from their fellow seabirds instead of finding food for themselves. But is this swashbuckling behaviour fiendishly unfair or daringly dashing?

Over the wild Scottish sea, a skua spots a gull catching fish. It gives chase, harassing the unlucky bird until it drops or disgorges (coughs up) its dinner... which the skua swiftly gobbles up in mid-air! It might seem mean, but stealing food from another species – known as kleptoparasitism – saves precious energy. Why bother searching for your next meal when you can just snatch it from someone else? Skuas have taken this sneaky strategy to the extreme and are very successful at it!

Kleptoparasitism has been observed in almost 200 different species of birds, including frigatebirds, raptors, crows and even ducks!

SEABIRDS OF PREY

Skuas are supremely adapted to their sky pirate lifestyle. These powerful predators have long wings, hooked beaks and sharp claws. But they're also fast flyers and incredibly agile in the air. No wonder skuas are sometimes called the 'falcons of the sea'!

You can see **FOUR** species of skua in the UK.

ARCTIC SKUA



© Bob Coyle

The most plunderful sky pirate of all! An Arctic skua gets much of its food by pinching it from smaller seabirds. This acrobatic, airborne thief is often seen flying low and fast over the waves in hot pursuit of a tern or kittiwake. The skua tirelessly follows every twist and turn of its target – displaying super-quick reflexes and reactions – until the tormented bird finally gives up its grub!

Skuas are also known as jaegers, from the German word for 'hunter'!

© Pete Richman

GREAT SKUA



© Peter Cairns / 2020VISION

This bulky bird is a cross between a buzzard and a big gull! The great skua (or 'bonxie' as it's called in Scotland) will hassle the largest seabirds for a free snack – even grabbing a gannet by the wing so that it falls into the water and brings up its fishy breakfast. The skua then scoffs the spoils! It also kills and eats other seabirds, including puffins.

Both Arctic and great skuas breed in the UK – in the far north of Scotland, mainly on Orkney and Shetland.

POMARINE SKUA



© Pete Richman

Another large skua that often attacks other seabirds and robs them of their prey. 'Poms' (as birdwatchers call them) aren't as acrobatic as Arctic skuas, so their chases are usually shorter and more aggressive. Can you spot their strange, spoon-shaped tail feathers?

Skuas fiercely protect their nests. They'll attack anyone or anything that strays too close – including humans, sheep and cattle!

LONG-TAILED SKUA



© Mathias Schaefer BIA Minden / naturpl.com

A small, slim skua with long, delicate tail streamers. This graceful species is the least piracy of the four, but it still steals from other seabirds as well as plucking its own food from the surface of the sea. In the summer they find food on the land and like to hunt little Arctic rodents called lemmings.

Neither the pomarine or long-tailed skua breeds in the UK, but these birds are sometimes seen along our coasts in spring and autumn as they migrate between the west or southwest coast of Africa (where they spend the winter) and their breeding grounds in the Arctic.

GALLERY

Send in your photos, poems, artwork and letters for your chance to feature in the gallery. If your artwork is picked as the star entry you'll win your very own drawing kit! **The perfect starter set for any budding wildlife artist.**



1 ★



2



3



9



4



11



8



10



5



6



12



7

- 1) **Puffin by Suki, aged 8** ★
Suki has created a wonderful little puffin!
- 2) **Waxcap by Reanie, aged 13**
The waxy texture here is perfect. We're in awe!
- 3) **Owl by Nell, aged 12**
This owl looks so alert, like it's searching for prey!
- 4) **Red kite by Alexis, aged 12**
By drawing each feather, Alexis has given this red kite a really textured look.
- 5) **Migrant hawker by William, aged 12**
It's so hard to photograph a flying dragonfly, but William has smashed it!
- 6) **Harvest mouse by Leonard, aged 8**
This mouse is adorable! A great action pose of it climbing up stems.
- 7) **Barn owl by Teddy, aged 8**
Teddy has captured the colours of a barn owl perfectly. Great job!
- 8) **Waxcaps by Holly, aged 10**
This is a lovely collection of fantastic fungi!
- 9) **Deer by Lola, aged 10**
We love the way Lola has set a scene by including grass and flowers.
- 10) **Orca by Harry, aged 6**
What a gorgeous orca! We love the bright blue water and the big wave.
- 11) **Pigeon by Erin, aged 11**
This is an incredible painting of a bird that is easily overlooked!
- 12) **Pigeons by Alfred, aged 9**
Alfred's nest, complete with origami pigeons, was a great surprise!

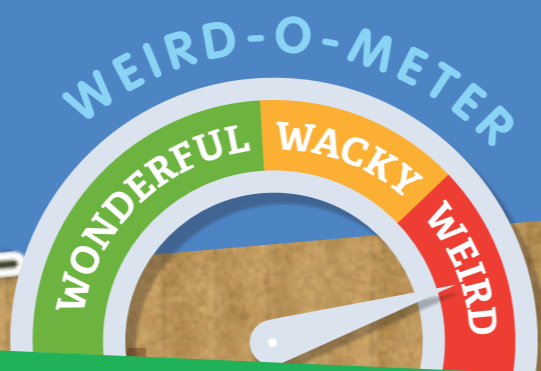
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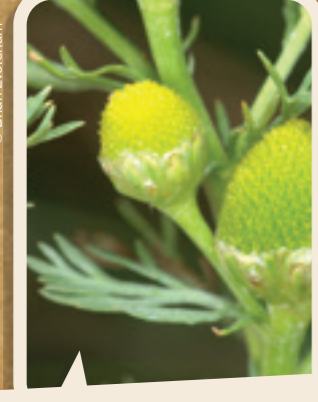
If we feature your artwork we will need your first name and your age, so don't forget to include them. We might also share it on our website and social media.

WEIRD NATURE

THIS ISSUE: SMELLY WILDLIFE



PINEAPPLE WEED



It's easy to guess what this yellow-flowered plant smells like! When the leaves are crushed or the flowers squeezed, they really do give off a distinctive smell of pineapple. These plants often grow by roads and pavements, bringing a tang of the tropics to our towns!

GREEN-VEINED WHITE



A fruity-smelling flower is one thing, but how about a butterfly with a surprising scent? Male green-veined whites attract females by producing a special pheromone – basically a natural perfume. This pheromone has a strong, lemony smell that even humans can detect!

GORSE



The flowers of this prickly plant are a joy to both the eyes and the nose! They're sunshine-yellow and give off the sweet smell of coconut. But it seems not everyone smells the same thing – some people find the coconut scent overpowering, and others struggle to smell it at all!

STORM PETREL



These little ocean explorers have a pleasant, musky smell. Scientists have discovered that storm petrels can recognise members of their family just by smell; and chicks can identify their own smell, which may help them find their way back to the nest if they wander off!

GOLD SWIFT



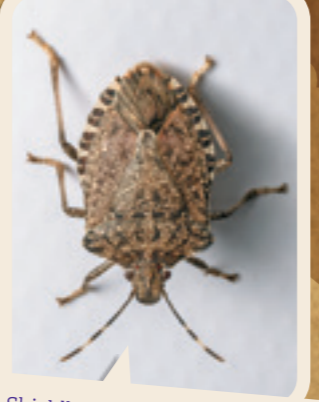
Butterflies aren't the only insects that can produce surprising smells. The gold swift is a moth that's reported to produce a pong of pineapple! At dusk, the males fly around the tops of plants, trying to attract females by releasing a pheromone with a pineapple-like scent.

BROOM



Just like gorse, broom has bright yellow flowers and a sweet scent. However, broom isn't spiky and instead of coconut, the flowers give off the appetising aroma of vanilla! As the name suggests, it was once used to make brooms for sweeping floors.

SHIELDBUGS



Shieldbugs have another name, which is much more insulting – stink bugs. If they feel threatened, they can release smelly liquids to put off predators. Some are stinkier than others. The brown marmorated stink bug is a particularly pungent example. It's native to Asia, but has been spreading across the world and may eventually move into the UK.

POLECAT

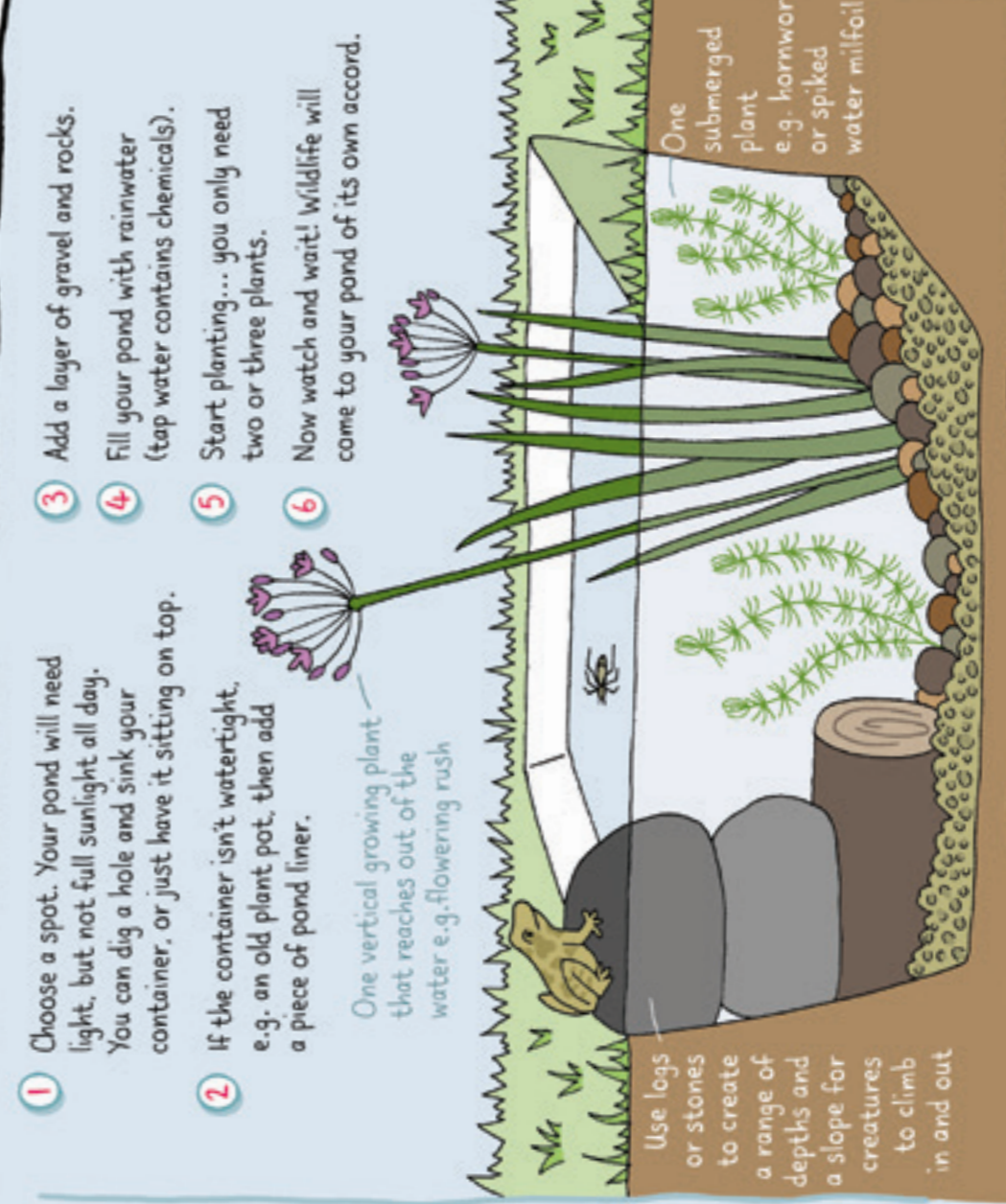


Like other members of the weasel family, polecats have scent glands on their bum that they use to leave smelly messages for others to find. If a polecat is hurt or frightened, these glands can produce a really foul stench to scare off the threat!

How to build a mini wildlife pond



- You will need:**
- a watertight container*
 - old bricks, rocks and pebbles
 - pond plants
 - spade
- * Is there anything that you can upcycle? It could be an old washing-up bowl, sink or even a plant pot. Aim for 20–30cm deep.



- 1 Choose a spot. Your pond will need light, but not full sunlight all day. You can dig a hole and sink your container, or just have it sitting on top.
- 2 If the container isn't watertight, e.g. an old plant pot, then add a piece of pond liner.
- 3 Add a layer of gravel and rocks.
- 4 Fill your pond with rainwater (tap water contains chemicals).
- 5 Start planting... you only need two or three plants.
- 6 Now watch and wait! Wildlife will come to your pond of its own accord.

www.wildlifewatch.org.uk

Don't introduce frogs. Fish or even water from another pond as this can spread disease.

Did you know that most of the UK's bees are solitary bees? These incredible insects have some interesting nesting habits...

BEE B&Bs

by Ryan Clark

WHAT IS A SOLITARY BEE?

In the UK, we have over 270 different species of bee! They are split into three main groups. There are the big, fluffy bumblebees, the honey bees, and the solitary bees. Most of our bees are solitary bees, with 250 different species! Many are small so easy to mistake for flies or wasps. Unlike bumblebees and honey bees, which can have hundreds of worker bees in a nest, solitary bees live alone. Each female bee collects pollen and nectar for her own nest. Pollen provides the protein young bees need to grow up big and strong, whilst nectar offers a sugar rush for energy.

Spined mason bee © Ryan Clark

BURROW NESTERS

Most solitary bees nest in the ground. The female bee digs a burrow with her legs, chucking the soil behind her. They usually nest by themselves, but in places where the ground is just right, you can sometimes see hundreds of bees making their own little burrows next to each other.

BED AND BREAKFAST

Bumblebees and honey bees look after their young and feed them as they grow. Solitary bees take an easier approach! Once she's made her nest, the female bee collects pollen and nectar from plants. She takes this pollen back to the nest, spits up some nectar and lays an egg. She then seals off this section of the nest and moves onto the next. When the young bee hatches, it will have some tasty pollen and nectar to snack on. Male bees are lazy and play no part in creating a nest or collecting pollen.

Pantaloan bee © Ryan Clark

SNEAKY BEES

Not all bees collect their own pollen and nectar. Some are sneaky and take over the nests of other bees. They can smell where the nests are and wait for the female bee to pop out for some food. They then quickly rush in and lay their eggs in the nest and run away before the female comes back!

Base-banded furrow bee © Ryan Clark

HOLE NESTERS

There are also lots of species that nest off the ground, in dead wood or plant stems. Beetles chew their way through dead wood creating long tunnels, which are perfect for bees to use after the beetles have finished with them! To keep the eggs and young bees warm and dry, the adult bees seal off each section of the nest. Red mason bees seal their nests with mud carried on their faces. Leafcutter bees use pieces of leaf they snip from plants using their powerful jaws.

Two-coloured mason bee © Nick Upton

SNAIL SPECIALISTS

Some species take advantage of empty snail shells, laying their eggs inside them! They then hide the snail shell by covering it in bits of plant. These bees aren't common, but they're amazing to see. One species covers the snail shell in twigs and grass stems, and can look like it's flying on a tiny broomstick as it carries bits of plant back to its nest.

Patchwork leafcutter bee © Ryan Clark



Ryan works for Cumbria Wildlife Trust and loves to spend his spare time finding solitary bees and bumblebees.



FOUR TO SPOT THIS SPRING

1. TAWNY MINING BEE



A flash of red across a path could be a female tawny mining bee! This species often digs nests in lawns and leaves behind little volcano-like heaps of soil.

2. ASHY MINING BEE



This bee looks like a panda with its fuzzy black and grey-white body! Look out for it nesting in the ground.

3. EARLY MINING BEE



You can spot this bee by looking for its red bum! Females also have blood red hair on their backs and often visit fruit trees.

4. RED MASON BEE



If you have a bee hotel, look out for this bee bringing back mud on its face! The female bees have two horns so the mud doesn't fall off. They also have fluffy red backs.

© Frank Porch

© Frank Porch

© Chris Lawrence

© Penny Frith

Imagine a stone archway. Right in the middle of the arch is the keystone – the stone that holds the whole thing together. As any engineer knows, without that one stone, the arch falls apart. Likewise, in nature, there are certain plants and animals that play a big role in holding the natural world together. We call these keystone species and they are our nature engineers!

Rob worked with Rewilding Europe to release European bison in the Romanian Carpathian Mountains. He now works for The Wildlife Trusts and is determined to bring back the keystone species of Britain!

The Nature Engineers

by Rob Stoneman



© David Parfitt / Cornwall Wildlife Trust

BEAVERS
The Wetland Engineer

Beavers live in rivers and lakes and love to eat tree leaves. To feed this diet, they totally transform their landscape! They gnaw bankside trees with their massive teeth until the trees fall down, so they can reach the leaves. Then they use the trunks and stems to build their dens and dam up streams. All this beavery engineering creates a watery world full of trees. It's perfect for them and perfect for many other plants and animals, such as frogs, toads, fish, and many wetland plants.

Beavers were hunted to extinction hundreds of years ago, but they are back in the UK, swimming in some of the rivers of southwest England and Scotland. The Wildlife Trusts are working hard to help more beavers return to the wild!



© Artur Fabor / naturepl.com

BISON
The Woodland Engineer

We've all seen films with buffalo roaming the Great Plains of America. But did you know we have a European version? It's the European bison, also known as the wisent. These big beasts are like American buffalo, but they prefer a landscape of forests and meadows. They love to chomp on leaves, twigs and bark, and wallow in great pits of mud. All this chomping and wallowing changes the forests they live in, making big open spaces where other wildlife can thrive.

European bison almost went extinct, with just 54 animals left in captivity in 1927. Careful breeding in zoos has allowed them to return to the wild in eastern Europe. There are now over 5,000 roaming wild! This year they will be released into Blean Woods by Kent Wildlife Trust. The woodland engineer is back!

Birds use bison fur to build their nests!

Their poo is great for hungry dung beetles!



© Ross Hadfield / 2020VISION

WILD HORSES
The Open Ground Engineer

Wild horses pull up grass, chew the bark of trees and roll on the ground to form sandy hollows, which makes space for new plants to grow. All of this creates the open landscapes that are special to so much of Europe's wildlife. The New Forest is a great example of what European landscapes might have looked like when wild horses roamed the continent.

Sadly, the true European wild horses, called tarpan, are extinct. But some old horse breeds do behave in similar ways to wild horses. In Britain, the nearest we have to tarpan are the Exmoor ponies that lead a pretty wild lifestyle on the Devon moors. We might one day see herds of wild horses on our heaths, coasts and uplands, engineering scrubby, open spaces for wildlife!



© Andy Rouse / 2020VISION

WILD BOAR
The Soil Engineer

Our wild version of pigs, these big, hairy beasts are the ultimate soil engineers! They snuffle through the soil, breaking up the earth to find tubers and grubs. Just a few wild boars can 'plough' up huge areas of woodland floor or meadow in a short space of time. The disturbed soil helps wildflowers and new trees to grow. They also make wet, muddy wallows to bathe in, creating mini wetlands that insects and amphibians can use.

Unfortunately, wild boars were hunted to extinction in Britain by the 13th century. But the boars are back! They were accidentally released from captivity and can now be found in some parts of England and Scotland. Not everyone loves them – they can play havoc with a finely manicured lawn – but for the sake of our wildlife, we need to learn to live with wild boar. Let the soil engineer return to Britain!

EUROPEAN EEL



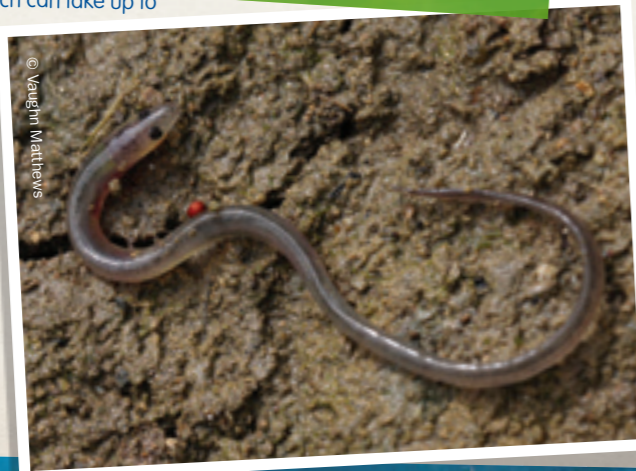
© Jack Perks

OCEAN EXPLORERS

European eels are long, slender fish with two little fins just behind their head and a long dorsal fin running along their back. They have an incredible lifecycle, involving one of the most impressive migrations on the planet!

Adult eels mostly live in freshwater habitats, like rivers, canals, and lakes. But when they're ready to breed they make their way downstream, out into the sea. They then swim all the way to the Sargasso Sea, in the western Atlantic Ocean. Some eels can travel over 3,000 miles on this journey!

When the adults arrive, they spawn and die soon after. The tiny baby eels then swim all the way back to the UK, which can take up to three years! These young eels, which are known as glass eels because they're so see-through, leave the sea and make their way into rivers, streams and lakes. As they grow, they get darker and we call them elvers. Eventually, they become adult eels and have to make the long journey back to the Sargasso Sea.



© Vaughn Matthews

ESSENTIAL FACTS

Scientific name

Anguilla anguilla

Size

Can grow over 1m long

Amazing fact

Eels are one of the few fishes that are good at swimming backwards!

OVERLAND ADVENTURERS

Did you know that eels can sometimes travel over land as well as in the water? They can survive out of the water for quite a long time and may crawl through wet grass to move from one waterbody to another.



ENDANGERED EELS

Eels used to be really abundant in our rivers. In Victorian times, they were so common they became a cheap and popular snack – including in pies! Now eels are one of the UK's most endangered species. Fishing isn't the only threat they face. Pollution can ruin their habitats, dams and other structures can block them from swimming up rivers, and climate change may even be shifting the currents that help the tiny eels swim back to Europe. However, there's lots of work being done to save these rare and wriggly fish!

WHERE DO SEABIRDS NEST?

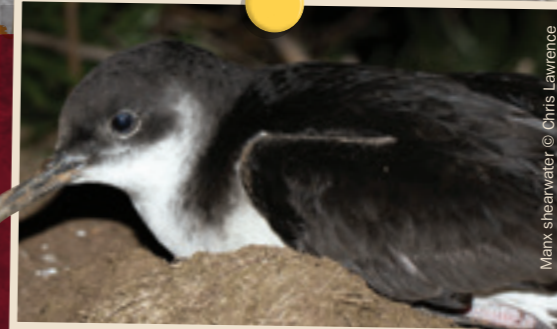
When you only spend a few months on land, you really have to choose the perfect place!



Guillemots and chick © Gillian Day

WANDERING THE WAVES

Many seabirds spend nearly the whole year out at sea, far away from land. Here they can fish for food, sleep on the water's surface, and even drink seawater thanks to a pair of salt glands! These special organs help take salts out of the blood and release them from the nostrils as a thick, salty fluid. But there's one thing they can't do out a sea – lay an egg!



Many shearwaters © Chris Lawrence

CLOSE TO THE COAST

Seabirds need to come back to land to nest, but they don't like to stray too far from the sea. Most seabirds in the UK nest on the coast, or on little islands just offshore.

They love to eat fish and other seafood, so it makes sense for them to stay as close to the water as they can. This means they don't have to fly as far to find food for their chicks, which saves them energy. A few seabirds, like common terns, will happily catch fish from lakes, so they



SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Another way many seabirds protect their eggs is by nesting in large colonies. With more birds around, there are more pairs of eyes to spot danger coming. This is especially effective for seabirds that dive-bomb potential predators, like Arctic terns. One pair of terns attacking a predator is annoying, dozens or even hundreds attacking it is enough to scare it away!

GOING UNDERGROUND

Some seabirds avoid predators by hiding their eggs in burrows or rocky crevices. Storm petrels will even use the gaps in a dry-stone wall! These nesting holes still need to be on cliffs or islands, otherwise rats could creep in and raid them. The biggest danger for these birds is bringing food back to their burrow safely – other birds might try to rob them for an easy meal. Some, like Manx shearwaters, come back to their burrows at night to avoid the gulls waiting to steal their catch.



Guillemots on cliff © Tom Hibbert

COMPETITIONS

WIN

THE EXTRAORDINARY WORLD OF BIRDS

Enter the world of birds for an incredible journey through the skies, into trees, and even underground! You'll discover parrots, hummingbirds, eagles, and more! This colourful book is written by the Urban Birder David Lindo, with illustrations by Claire McElfrack.

We've got **FOUR** copies to give away.

Buy online at: wtru.st/world-bird RRP: £14.99



FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN:

Tell us which two species of skua nest in the UK. (The answer is in the magazine!)



WIN

BUILD YOUR OWN BINOCULARS

Binoculars help you to see and enjoy birds and other wildlife in greater detail, and with this easy to assemble kit you can now build your own pair! Made from sustainable cardboard, the pieces just slot together with no glue, no mess, and no fuss.

We've got **TWO** kits to give away!

Buy online at: buildyourownkits.com RRP: £19.99

FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN:

Tell us what animal you would most like to see through your new binoculars!



WIN

A BUG'S WORLD

Did you know that flies can help us solve crime? Or that spiders can be astronauts? Discover the extraordinary things bugs do for us – and how we can look after them too – in this vibrant book written by the Natural History Museum's insect expert!

We've got **FOUR** copies to give away.

Buy online at: wtru.st/bug-world-book RRP: £14.99

FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN:

Just answer this question! How many species of bee are there in the UK?

- a) Fewer than 50
- b) Around 150
- c) Over 270



COMPETITION RULES

Send your competition entries to us: **By email** watchcomps@wildlifetrusts.org **By post** Wildlife Watch, The Kiln, Mather Road, Newark, Nottinghamshire NG24 1WT
Don't forget to include your name, age and a way of contacting you about your entry! **DEADLINE: 31 May 2022**
Competition entries may be used on our website and social media channels.