

BIODIVERSITY PROJECTS OFFICER'S REPORT – 12 JUNE 2019

Mammalian Carnivores on the Increase

- The University of Exeter, the Vincent Wildlife Trust, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and Scottish Natural Heritage have reviewed survey reports from the last 40 years relating to the status of British carnivorous mammals. They compared changes in the species' distribution extent and population sizes as well as reviewing human activities that have helped or hindered Britain's native carnivores.
- The study found that, with the exception of wildcats, the status of Britain's native mammalian carnivores (badger, fox, otter, pine marten, polecat, stoat and weasel) has "markedly improved" since the 1960s.
- The improved status of these mammals has mostly been without human intervention in that the animals have recovered once harmful human activities, such as hunting, use of toxic chemicals and habitat destruction, have reduced or stopped.
- Some mammal populations have been boosted by reintroduction programmes. Pine martens and otters are both good examples of successful reintroduction schemes.
- Several mammals were in danger of going extinct in the 1970s but have since recovered. Otters, for example, have almost completely recolonised Britain and the badger population has roughly doubled since the 1980s.
- Polecats have expanded across southern Britain from Wales.
- Pine martens have expanded from the Scottish Highlands.
- Fox numbers have risen since the 1960s, though an apparent decline in the last decade may be linked with dwindling rabbit numbers.
- Some of the species can pose problems for gamekeepers, anglers and farmers, and work must be done to find ways to prevent conflict and allow long-term co-existence as the species expand their ranges and numbers.

Rare Seahorses in Cornwall

- An annual oyster survey monitors the catch rates of oysters and other marine life which gives an indication of the health of an estuary.
- A survey of the Fal oyster beds, being run by Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA), identified a rare seahorse indicating that the estuary, with its well managed sustainable fishery, is still productive and in reasonable health.
- Seahorses are very rare in Cornwall and this female short-snouted seahorse was the first to be found since the survey began in 2014.
- Oyster populations have been shown to be following normal cycles of abundance on the beds which shows that the Fal fishery is operating sustainably.
- Managers of the Fal oyster fishery were very forward thinking when, in 1936, they banned the use of engines of any other power source except sail, oar and human muscle – the only fishery of its kind in Europe.

Warm-Water Species Moved North during Marine Heatwave

- A recent study by the University of California revealed that an unprecedented number of southern marine warm-water species moved northward into California during the 2014-2016 marine heatwave – one of the longest on record.
- Of 67 rare, warm-water, species sightings 37 had not been recorded so far north previously.
- Species observed further north than their normal range included jellyfish, nudibranchs, fish, dolphins and sea turtles.
- The study may well reflect what will happen as a result of climate change.
- The majority of the species that travelled north returned to the southern range when the heatwave ended. However, some of the species such as the sunburst anemone, chocolate porcelain crab, a brittle star and some barnacle species appear to have remained.

Local Nature Reserve (LNRs)

A range of projects have taken place at the LNRs:

- The results of the Green Flag Award applications, for 2019/20, for the Aquadrome, Chorleywood House Estate and Leavesden Country Park are due in July.
- The scheme recognises and rewards well managed parks and open spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the UK and around the world.
- Judges visited the Aquadrome in April to carry out a full assessment whilst Chorleywood House Estate and Leavesden Country Park will be the subject of a mystery shopper visit during 2019.
- There are eight over-arching categories upon which parks and open spaces are assessed. The site must, for example, be welcoming, safe and secure, clean and well maintained, sustainably managed, have community involvement and be well managed.
- For more information go to:
<http://www.greenflagaward.org/>
- The cattle returned to Croxley Common Moor in May and will probably remain on site until the end of September.
- The Friends of Croxley Common Moor are continuing their programme of activities and events which includes ragwort removal, bat walks, moth walks, butterfly walks, river dipping, etc. The Friends meet at 10am on the second Sunday of each month. Everyone is welcome and no previous experience is necessary as full instructions/tools will be provided on the day.
- For more information about the work of the Friends and the upcoming events at Croxley Common Moor visit:
www.croxleycommonmoor.org.uk
- The cattle are due to return to Chorleywood House Estate in June. They will be grazing the field behind The Readings as well in Dell Field and the Dell.

- The Friends of Chorleywood House Estate carry out tasks on the first and third Tuesday of each month at 10am. They have recently been working to maintain the Sunken Garden, ensuring the leat is clear of debris and maintaining the sculptures around the pond. The Friends are always happy to have new volunteers join them whether it be for a one-off task or on a more regular basis. More information can be found on their website:

www.chorleywoodhouse.org.uk/

- The Withey Beds is in the first year of its GAP and key actions include maintaining scrub in the fen area to less than 20% cover, carrying out a great crested newt survey in the main pond, pollarding the large willows along the river on rotation and monitoring the existing scrapes and ponds for growth of rank vegetation.
- The annual guided walk took place in May with a good turnout.
- Work is on-going in Oxhey Woods. Future tasks range from rhododendron control and pond restoration to glade creation and enhancement of the sculpture trail.
- The Oxhey Woods Conservation Volunteers meet on the first and third Sunday of each month at 10am. For more details visit:

www.owcv.btck.co.uk/

- Various family activities have been organised by the Council's Senior Park Ranger. Activities have included welly walks, bug hunts and bat walks. For information on all of the upcoming events go to:

www.threeriversleisure.co.uk/