**Biodiversity Projects Officer’s Report**

Hertfordshire Sustainability Forum (HSF) Local Nature Partnership (LNP)

* No update since the last meeting.

Red Squirrel Reintroduction

* The charity, Trees for Life, has relocated red squirrels from Iverness-shire and Moray to woods near Kinlocheweo and at Plockton.
* These woods provide suitable red squirrel habitat but the squirrels are unable to reach them on their own due to barriers.
* Overall the project wants to establish 10 new populations in the northwest Highlands.
* Previously relocated red squirrels are known to have bred which is a good sign of success.
* The squirrels will be continually monitored as the project moves forward.

Golden Eagles in Scotland

* Since 2003 the population of golden eagles in Scotland has risen by15%, from 442 pairs to 508.
* As the population is over 500 pairs this means that the golden eagle can now be classified as having a favourable conservation status in the UK.
* Whilst many areas of Scotland have seen the population rise some areas have seen a decline. Although the reasons are not clear it is likely to be attributable to a combination of factors such as the previously poor spring and summer weather affecting breeding, persecution, forestry management and former deer grazing reducing habitat quality for prey.
* Scotland may now be home to the entire UK population after news last year that England’s only resident golden eagle may have died.

**Galapagos Giant Tortoise**

* The Galapagos Islands are home to a great variety of plants and animals which are found nowhere else on Earth, including giant tortoises.
* There are many species which have all evolved to suit the island or volcanic conditions, resulting in a great variety of sizes and shell shapes.
* Hunting and the appearance of invasive species over the last 200 years has resulted in a 90% population reduction, including many species extinctions.
* However, conservation work is helping to reverse this trend. For example, tortoises can no longer be hunted for food and a recovery programme has been initiated:
  + The Pinzón Island tortoise had not bred successfully for more than 100 years due to non-native black rats preying on hatchlings so more than 5000 eggs were removed and hatched in safety before the young were released back in to the wild.
  + Non-native rats have now been eliminated from Pinzón Island which allows hatchlings to survive to adulthood for the first time in more than 100 years.
  + The Española tortoise was down to just 15 individuals by 1960. These were all taken in to captivity from where more than 2000 captive reared young were released in to the wild. The population now stands at more than 1000.
  + Goats have been introduced to the islands over the last 150 years with serious consequences. Since 1997 more than 140,000 feral goats have been removed which is greatly enhancing the habitat that the tortoises rely upon.
* The last known Pinta Island giant tortoise, Lonesome George, died in 2012 after many years in an American zoo. He has now returned home to the Galapagos, but he has been taxidermied! However, he will help educate thousands of visitors from the recently renovated visitors’ centre where he proudly stands.

**Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and Open Spaces**

* Various projects have taken place at the LNRs and open spaces:
* Applications to be re-awarded Green Flag Awards at The Aquadrome (Rickmansworth), Chorleywood House Estate (Chorleywood) and Leavesden Country Park (Abbots Langley) were made earlier this year.
* Chorleywood House Estate and Leavesden Country Park were the subject of a mystery shopper visit whilst the Aquadrome had a full on-site assessment by official Green Flag judges in June.
* The results are due to be announced at the end of July.
* There are eight categories upon which the parks and open spaces are assessed. The site must, amongst other things, be welcoming, safe and secure, clean and well maintained, sustainably managed, have community involvement, and be well managed.
* For more information go to:

[www.keepbritaintidy.org/GreenFlag](http://www.keepbritaintidy.org/GreenFlag)

* A new grazier had to be secured for Croxley Common Moor this year. The cattle are Herefords crossed with Charolais which are docile and good around people. The cattle arrived in April and are due to leave at the end of September, subject to the weather conditions and vegetation growth.
* The Friends of Croxley Common Moor are in the middle of their spring/summer programme of walks, talks and volunteer activities and will start their autumn/winter programme of scrub bashing in September.
* The next events and activities are:
* Wild flowers in summer, 10am Sunday 16 July.
* Ragwort removal, 10am Sunday 13 August.
* Bat walk, 8pm Friday 18 August – **PLACES MUST BE BOOKED** via Kay FitzGerald.
* Scrub bashing, 10am Sunday 10 September.
* Scrub bashing, 10am Sunday 8 October.
* Trees and bushes in autumn, 10am Sunday 15 October.
* For more information and all of the event dates for Croxley Common Moor visit:

[www.croxleycommonmoor.org.uk](http://www.croxleycommonmoor.org.uk)

* A new grazier also has to be secured for Chorleywood House Estate. The breed of cattle due to arrive at Chorleywood House Estate is Aberdeen Angus, which are known to be good around people.
* The cattle are due to arrive this month and will remain on site until the end of September, depending on the weather and vegetation growth.
* The cattle will be in the field behind The Readings, The Dell and Dell Nature Reserve, as in previous years.
* CMS has worked with Three Rivers District Council and the Friends of Chorleywood House Estate to put together a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) requesting funds to improve a number of aspects around the Local Nature Reserve including interpretation, fencing infrastructure for grazing and improving information on the heritage of the site. We are currently waiting to hear the outcome of the initial bid.
* The Dexter cattle arrived at The Withey Beds in June. There is a small family of five cattle in the main field which will remain on site until the end of September, again subject to the weather and vegetation growth.
* A small amount of vegetation removal has taken place to open up the central ditch. This will not only reduce the amount of leaf litter entering the ditch but also increase light levels.
* A number of family activities continue to be organised by the Council’s Park Ranger. For example there have been bat walks and general wildlife walks at the Aquadrome. Keep an eye on the Council’s website for the latest events and activities:

[www.threerivers.gov.uk/egcl-page/park-ranger-services](http://www.threerivers.gov.uk/egcl-page/park-ranger-services)