



Wildlife Trust Ecology Groups

Bulletin 03

Spring 2009

“good conservation depends on good science”

The regular update for all Ecology Group members in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough

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New resources: supporting naturalists and natural history

Ensuring that natural history skills, such as species identification, are not lost but remain part of our heritage, is a core element of the Ecology Groups initiative and as part of the personal development of our volunteers and staff it is important that resources are made available in support of this. With this in mind we have created the 'resources page', part of the Ecology Groups section of the Trusts website, which is now open for access. A range of identification keys and checklists for groups such as lichens, ferns, willows, water bugs, beetles, grasshoppers and crickets, are available to download and use. Use the following link for access:

<http://www.wildlifebcnp.org/ecology-resources.htm>

Comments and suggestions for improvements are welcome. Each item carries an email address for the author or manager of the resource to whom comments should be sent. Please also copy in Nick Millar, Conservation Monitoring Manager, to any correspondence. General questions or comments can be emailed to nick.millar@wildlifebcnp.org.

Limestone Ecology Group: ground beetle monitoring project

2009 will mark the official start of the Sammock's Hill ground beetle monitoring project. Following on from the two weekend ground beetle training workshops run at Ring Haw Field Station in 2008, we are continuing these events in a similar format but as an Ecology Group monitoring project. The 2009 project will run on the corresponding weekends to the 2008 WTWs (see 'Ecology Groups events list' below).

Sammock's Hill at Old Sulehay nature reserve in northern Northamptonshire presents a realistic opportunity to carry out some proactive conservation work by restoring 12ha of ex-arable farmland back to species-rich limestone grassland. Sammock's Hill's south-facing topography, underlying geology of limestone, appropriate soil conditions and its proximity to existing limestone sites, means the site has the potential for successful restoration.

In 2009, the ground beetle monitoring project will endeavour to use pitfall-trapping and direct searching to identify the composition of the community of ground beetle species present in the developing limestone grassland habitats in order to provide information to help with the management of this important restoration project. Collecting and identification (using microscopes) will take place during the course of each weekend. The two weekends cover the peak periods (spring and autumn) for ground beetle activity. Contact Henry Stanier to take part in this project.

Bat box project

Last autumn, Trust staff and wardens reviewed the distribution and condition of bat boxes (artificial roosts for bats) on our nature reserves, as part of our work in updating our overview of survey and monitoring across the three counties. This work will help plan future survey and monitoring projects as well as complement existing ones, such as the Bat Pathfinders project. We are now in the process of setting up a coordinated annual programme of bat box checks, using licensed staff and volunteers (in liaison with the local bat groups).

Information gathered included:

1. **Location of bat box** (reserve name, reserve compartment, habitat and grid reference)
2. **Design/material of bat box** (e.g. wooden, woodcrete)
3. **Approximate height of bat box above ground** (there is no need to climb for this purpose)
4. **Condition of bat box**
5. **Date when erected**
6. **If it is already checked, how often and by whom**

By the end of this spring we will be able to report of the first set of checks of those bat boxes identified this year.

European Bat Night

It is European Bat Night on **Saturday 29 August 2009** and Trust staff and volunteers will be simultaneously surveying several Wildlife Trust nature reserves as part of public guided bat walks. This will follow up on the review of bat boxes

being carried out during autumn 2008 and spring 2009, and initial **three counties survey** work this coming May.

Reserves to be visited include Cambourne, Felmersham, Flitwick Moor, Grafham Water, Pitsford Reservoir, Stibbington, Summer Leys, Woodston Ponds and Woodford Halse (see 'Ecology Groups events' list below)

Bedfordshire tigers

Over the coming few months the focus for Bedfordshire Ecology Group will be to round-off data collection for the *Green Tiger Beetle Project* at Cooper's Hill nature reserve. This exciting project, funded by Biffaward, has studied the impacts of increasing tree cover and visitor numbers on the flora and fauna of Cooper's Hill. Field work will include measurements of path erosion to assess the impact of high numbers of visitors on the reserve. It is possible that some areas may be damaged by too much use, although active erosion can also provide a valuable habitat for warmth-loving invertebrates.

There will also be work to finish mapping of woodland trees, information that will complement previous assessments of litter-fall on the reserve. Finally, there will be more insect sorting events at Priory Country Park to identifying specimens collected at Cooper's Hill and other reserves last summer. Some of these specimens will form part of a valuable reference collection to aid identification work in the future.

Breeding birds

Breeding bird transects can be carried out by a single volunteer or by a pair of volunteers (providing an important learning opportunity for relatively inexperienced naturalists). This year we have opportunities for volunteers to put their skills to good use by monitoring birds on reserves in Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.

Each transect involves a minimum of 3-4 morning visits to the relevant nature reserve, to map out bird activity. Volunteers will need to be able to identify bird species by their songs and calls. If you would like to volunteer to help carry out bird transects this year, either by yourself or as part of a small team, please contact Henry Stanier, Ecology Groups Officer (see events list for contact details).

Vacancies for breeding bird transects this March:

Cambridgeshire

Brampton Wood, nr Grafham

Dogsthorpe Star Pit, nr Peterborough / Eye

Grafham Water, Cambridgeshire

Northamptonshire

Glaphorn Cow Pastures, nr Oundle

Old Sulehay, nr Yarwell / Wansford

Twywell Hills & Dales, between Kettering and Thrapston

Hover Watch

This year, during the spring and summer, we would like to continue the development of woodland monitoring using hoverflies at Old Sulehay nature reserve. Weekday and weekend activities will be organised to support this process and help volunteers with their species identification skills.

If you would like to help with this project directly, through volunteering your time or help through providing photographs of hoverflies (a valuable resource for our training events and when gathering general records) then contact Henry Stanier. Due to the nature of the fieldwork you will need to be flexible with your availability in order to take advantage of favourable weather conditions.

Ecology Group volunteer support days

This year, for the first time, we are running a special type of event to support the volunteers of the Ecology Groups. These sessions will assist volunteers in carrying out their assigned monitoring projects and help with their personal development. They will provide an opportunity to get together with other Ecology Group volunteers and staff, and work on subjects ranging from birdsong and wildflower species identification to the processing of monitoring project data. A few sessions have been organised for the coming months, more will follow (see events list).

Ecology Groups events list 2009

The following list of events and activities is not exhaustive but it does include project work and training sessions where teamwork is important, either because it is needed to complete the project successfully or because it makes the process of learning more effective and efficient, and enjoyable.

For each date it is important that the contact knows who is coming, with as much notice as possible, so that the activities can be planned and further information can be provided. Please make contact now and let us know what you want to join in this year.

Unless other contact information is provided, please contact Henry Stanier, Ecology Groups Officer, by email henry.stanier@wildlifebcnp.org or by phone **01954 713519** to book on events marked as follows:

LEG (Limestone Ecology Group)
NVEG (Nene Valley Ecology Group)
CBCWEG (Cambridgeshire Boulder Clay Woodlands Ecology Group)

To book on events marked as:

BEG (Bedfordshire Ecology Group)

Please contact Ed Turner, Ecology Groups Officer for Bedfordshire, by email ed.turner@wildlifebcnp.org or by phone **07738 243676**.

Events

Thu 26 Mar: **BEG Tree survey project**, 10am start, Cooper's Hill nature reserve (rugby club entrance), Ampthill, Bedfordshire.

Tue 31 Mar: **BEG Erosion mapping survey project**, 10am start, Cooper's Hill nature reserve (rugby club entrance), Ampthill, Bedfordshire.

Thu 02 Apr: **Volunteer support day**, 1pm - 9pm, Ring Haw Field Station, Old Sulehay nature reserve, Northamptonshire. Open to all WTEG volunteers. Contact Henry Stanier for further details or to book.

Wed 15 April: **NVEG team training – water beetles**, 7.30pm start, Lings Environmental Centre, Northampton, Northamptonshire.

Fri 17 Apr: **BEG Butterfly monitoring project**, 10am start, Totternhoe Quarry nature reserve, Bedfordshire. Meet at the end of the Lime Kilns Road in Totternhoe.

Sun 19 April: **NVEG team training – water bugs and beetles**, 10am - 3.30pm, Pitsford Fishing Lodge, Pitsford Water nature reserve, Northamptonshire. Includes a field trip to Storton's Pits nature reserve, Northampton, to practice sampling techniques and monitoring project methods.

Tue 21 Apr: **BEG Butterfly monitoring project**, Pegsdon Hills nature reserve, Bedfordshire. Meet at the entrance to Pegsdon Hills Reserve.

Wed 22 Apr: **BEG Butterfly monitoring project**, Blow's Downs nature reserve, Bedfordshire. Meet at the Blow's Downs car park.

Sat 25 Apr: **Team training – Warbler identification**, 7am -1pm, Grafham Water nature reserve, Cambridgeshire. Open to all WTEG volunteers engaged in bird monitoring projects. Contact Henry Stanier for further details or to book.

Sun 26 Apr: **Team training – Warbler identification**, 7am -1pm, Ring Haw Field Station, Old Sulehay nature reserve, Northamptonshire. Open to all WTEG volunteers engaged in bird monitoring projects. Contact Henry Stanier for further details or to book.

Tue 28 Apr: **BEG Butterfly monitoring project**, 10am start, Totternhoe Quarry nature reserve, Bedfordshire. Meet at the end of the Lime Kilns Road in Totternhoe.

Thur 30 Apr: **BEG Butterfly monitoring project**, 10am start, Totternhoe Quarry nature reserve, Bedfordshire. Meet at the end of the Lime Kilns Road in Totternhoe.

Tue 05 May: **NVEG team training – three counties bat survey project**, 7.30pm-9.30pm, Pitsford Fishing Lodge, Pitsford Water nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

Tue 12 May: **Volunteer support day**, 1pm - 9pm, Ring Haw Field Station, Old Sulehay nature reserve, Northamptonshire. Open to all WTEG volunteers. Contact Henry Stanier for further details or to book.

Sat 16 May: **Three counties bat survey project**, 7.30pm start, simultaneous survey of several Wildlife Trust reserves in our area by Ecology Group volunteers and Wildlife Trust staff. Open to all WTEG volunteers. Contact Henry Stanier for further details.

Mon 18 May: **CBCWEG Bat Pathfinders**, evening start TBC Gamlingay and Gransden/Waresley Woods nature reserves, Cambridgeshire.

Wed 20 May: **LEG Bat Pathfinders**, evening start TBC, Ring Haw Field Station, Old Sulehay nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

Wed 27 May: **LEG Bat Pathfinders**, evening start TBC Short Wood nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

Fri 29 May - Sun 31 May: **LEG Ground beetle monitoring project** (full weekend), 7pm Fri start, Ring Haw Field Station, Old Sulehay nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

Tue 09 Jun: **Volunteer support day**, 1pm - 9pm, Ring Haw Field Station, Old Sulehay nature reserve, Northamptonshire. Open to all WTEG volunteers. Contact Henry Stanier for further details or to book.

Sat 13 Jun: **NVEG Botanical monitoring project**, 10am start, Ditchford Lakes and Meadow nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

Sun 28 Jun & Mon 29 Jun: **LEG Botanical monitoring project**, 10am start, Ring Haw Field Station, Old Sulehay nature reserve (Sammock's Hill, Limestone Grassland Restoration Project), Northamptonshire.

Mon 06 Jul: **CBCWEG Bat Pathfinders**, evening start TBC Gamlingay and Gransden / Waresley Woods nature reserves, Cambridgeshire.

Wed 08 Jul: **LEG Bat Pathfinders**, evening start TBC, Ring Haw Field Station, Old Sulehay nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

Fri 10 Jul: **LEG Botanical monitoring project**, 10am start, Collyweston Quarries nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

Mon 13 Jul: **LEG Bat Pathfinders**, evening start TBC Short Wood nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

Sat 29 Aug: **European Bat Night**, 8pm start. Public guided walk and three counties bat survey on several reserves across our area. Open to all WTEG volunteers. Contact Henry Stanier for further details.

Mon 14 Sep: **CBCWEG Bat Pathfinders**, evening start TBC Gamlingay and Gransden / Waresley Woods, Cambridgeshire.

Wed 16 Sep: **LEG Bat Pathfinders**, evening start TBC, Ring Haw Field Station, Old Sulehay nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

Fri 18 Sep - Sun 20 Sep: **LEG Ground beetle monitoring project** (full weekend), 7pm Fri start, Ring Haw Field Station, Old Sulehay nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

Wed 23 Sep: **LEG Bat Pathfinders**, evening start TBC, Short Wood nature reserve, Northamptonshire.

What do you think of this bulletin? Send your questions and suggestions by email, or write to:

Henry Stanier

Ecology Groups Officer / Bulletin Editor

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