



Photo: Grey seal pup ©Neil Winston Symonds

# Biodiversity News in Norfolk

## No 60 (Winter 2016)

## Welcome to our Winter e-bulletin!

Winter is upon us and it is the time of year for hot drinks and fluffy jumpers! It has been an exciting time for wildlife this past month with the new Bird and Mammal report released, visit **Local NEWS** to find out more!

**Pupping season has started on the Norfolk coast, with around half of the world's population of grey seals found in the UK alone. The protection of our grey seals is of international conservation importance and at this time of year they are very vulnerable to disturbance. If you do visit a seal colony this year, please respect these charismatic creatures!**

- Stay at least 20 metres away from the seals
- Look out for seals in the dunes and give them a wide berth
- Seals are wild animals and should not be approached, although they look relatively harmless they can move quickly when they want to and have a nasty bite
- Keep dogs on a lead
- Keep to marked viewing areas and respect the fencing

More information can be found at: <http://friendsofhorseyseals.co.uk/>

In **National NEWS**, we have heard about the population increase of the golden eagle; whilst in **International NEWS**, scientists have found a possible explanation for why seabirds eat plastic.

Now that the frost has started to set in, why not try out one of our WildWalks and see if you can spot anything? To find out more and print off this month's WildWalk route map and description, check out **WildWalk of the Month!**

**All of us at the Environment Team wish you a great holiday and a happy new year!**

Don't forget, you can submit your wildlife records online at <http://nbis.org.uk/AllSpeciesSurvey> or email them to us at [nbis@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:nbis@norfolk.gov.uk). Our data protection policy can be found on our website at <http://www.nbis.org.uk/privacy-policy>.

It doesn't have to be a rare or unusual species – recording common and widespread species are just as important. From blackbirds to oak trees, hedgehogs to ladybirds, let's see how many species can be recorded in 2016!

**Natural Environment Team  
Community and Environmental Services,**

## Norfolk County Council

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Please do email us at [nbis@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:nbis@norfolk.gov.uk) if you have any news or events that you would like us to feature in the next or coming issues. And do feel free to forward to anyone you feel would also be interested.

You can download this e-bulletin as a pdf here: <http://www.nbis.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/E-BulletinNov2016.pdf> You can also download past e-bulletins as a pdf here: <http://www.nbis.org.uk/newsletterse-bulletins>

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## Local NEWS

### First polecat spotted in Norfolk amongst highlights of County Wildlife Report

Polecats have made a remarkable comeback after populations plummeted in Britain a hundred years ago, the animals were killed because of their appetite for game birds and chickens. According to the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society's Bird and Mammal Report, the polecat is back in Norfolk! <http://tinyurl.com/zk7xjbg>

### British butterflies could be wiped out by extreme weather, according to scientists

Heat waves, cold snaps and heavy rain may have already contributed to crashing populations of butterflies. While scientists know that climate change can cause lasting and intense damage to ecosystems, there is less knowledge about the way that shorter spells of extreme weather can affect them <http://tinyurl.com/jcv2rwx>

### Drivers warned of deer danger in Breckland hotspots

The autumn rutting season is now in full swing, increasing the dangers caused by deer wandering on to rural roads. This period of heightened activity between October and December sees bucks becoming more territorial and aggressive, and young deer dispersing from their breeding areas <http://tinyurl.com/z8e8a5s>

### New discovery trail at BTO's Thetford reserve to teach visitors about wildlife

The British Trust for Ornithology has opened a new discovery trail at its Nunnery Lakes reserve in Thetford. The project is designed to educate residents and visitors about the vast array of wildlife which inhabits the reserve <http://tinyurl.com/juyta5t>

### Norfolk film company reveals what it's like to work on Planet Earth II

The BBC's Planet Earth II has taken the nation by storm drawing in more than 10 million viewers. This amazing series is partly thanks to a film company based in Norfolk <http://tinyurl.com/juovmaj>

### A farmer hailed as 'a conservation stalwart of the very best kind' has been honoured with a national award for wetland creation.

Richard Waddingham from Norfolk accepted the Marsh Award for Wetland Conservation at the AGM of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT). The award, run in partnership by the Marsh Christian Trust and the WWT, honours exceptional individual achievement in local wetland conservation. It was presented by Martin Spray, Chief Executive of the WWT <http://tinyurl.com/z9265yu>

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## National NEWS

### Golden eagle numbers close to historic levels

With more than 500 pairs, golden eagle populations have risen by 15% since 2003. Scotland is now thought to be home to the UK's entire population of golden eagles <http://tinyurl.com/pjte5t2>

### Salting roads harms frog numbers, study warns

Naturally occurring chemicals used in de-icing substances find their way into ponds where the amphibians breed and can change the sex of young frogs during early development. This can lead to reduced fitness in populations and subsequent reduction in offspring survival <http://tinyurl.com/z4fjak5>

## UK endangered red squirrels suffering from leprosy

British red squirrels are infected with two different strains of the bacterium that causes leprosy, both strains pose no threat to humans but put further pressure on red squirrel populations <http://tinyurl.com/zjegk5v>

## Wetland archaeological sites at risk

Environmental change could put wetland sites at risk by degrading ancient organic material. A lack of oxygen is key to the preservation of wetland archaeological sites. A drop in water level can cause higher oxygen saturation, this creates an acidic environment that destroys previously preserved organic materials <http://tinyurl.com/zxyyqyc>

## Warning over invasive flatworm posing a threat to UK wildlife

A Brazilian flatworm poses a threat to soil health and wildlife was discovered this summer in a plant imported from the Netherlands at a garden centre. The worm was first found in Europe on Guernsey in 2008 but has spread to France, Italy and Spain <http://tinyurl.com/zn5j73g>

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## International NEWS

### Scientists have found why seabirds eat plastic

Plastic in the sea gives off a smell that attracts foraging birds, the smell, similar to the odour of rotting seaweed is caused by the breakdown of plankton that sticks to the floating pieces of plastic. The discovery could explain why seabirds such as the albatross swallow plastic, causing injury or death <http://tinyurl.com/ntpzzzh>

### Tasmanian devil milk can fight superbugs

The marsupial's milk contains important peptides that appear to be able to kill hard-to-treat infections, experts believe that marsupials produce superbug fighting milk because their offspring have to grow in a relatively dirty environment <http://tinyurl.com/hrnudpk>

### Ross Sea in Antarctica to become world's largest marine protected area

Delegates from 24 countries and the European Union have agreed that that the 600,000 square miles of the Southern Ocean will gain protection from commercial fishing for 35 years. The Ross Sea is home to 38% of the world's Adelie penguins, 30% of the world's Antarctic petrels and 6% of the world's Antarctic minke whales <http://tinyurl.com/hfucoyo>

### Growth of city trees can cut air pollution, says report

Particulate matter are microscopic particles that become trapped in the lungs of people breathing in polluted air. Planting trees is a cost-effective way to tackle urban air pollution, a growing problem for many cities <http://tinyurl.com/zsy98xr>

### Database developed that helps plant 'right tree for right place'

German researchers have compiled a 400-species database encouraging the planting of trees in urban areas that are focused on the biodiversity that they will benefit. The hope for this database is that city planners, landscape architects and homeowners will use the database <http://tinyurl.com/j4oagku>

### More news here:

<http://www.nbis.org.uk/news#Nov2016NationalNews>

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## GETTING INVOLVED

### Wildlife Recorders of Tomorrow

There's a piece missing... we need your help to build up a picture of The Brecks' wildlife!

The Brecks is an important area for wildlife both in a UK and international context. However, many of the species records come from a few well recorded designated sites, with recording often done on an ad hoc basis making detecting changes over time difficult.

Led by NBIS, this project will establish a network of volunteers recording wildlife throughout the Breck New Ground Landscape Partnership Scheme area (a project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund).

Whether you're a complete beginner or a seasoned surveyor, there are plenty of opportunities to get involved, with lots of support and training.

Pop along to an introductory session to find out more about the project. There will also be a variety of species ID courses and photography workshops on offer.

The project will operate at 3 levels:

- Beginner: provide training and encouragement to those new to recording wildlife.
- Species surveillance: help people take the next step into more serious recording of sites. This will allow a number of important sites in the Brecks to be monitored and will also help to ensure sustainable long-term monitoring of sites where work is taking place as part of other Breaking New Ground projects. Data collected will feed into the Norfolk Species Surveillance Network.
- River corridor survey – Little Ouse headwaters to Brandon: A non-native species survey of the Little Ouse river, from its headwaters at Redgrave and Lopham Fens to Brandon.



Whether you are an individual or part of a community group, if you are interested in getting involved, please email [nbis@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:nbis@norfolk.gov.uk)

More details at <http://tinyurl.com/ppr7mdg>

**To book onto an introductory session to Wildlife Recorders of Tomorrow please go to <http://tinyurl.com/nek3zq7>**



### **Capturing our Coast 'Spermwatch'**

This autumn a nationwide campaign to survey UK beaches for signs of lugworm reproduction has been launched. Anyone can get involved by searching their local beach for lugworm sperm puddles. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/hg5yelh>

### **Ready. Steady. Grow!**

Last year, I Dig Trees enabled OVO and TCV to inspire and educate thousands of people about the benefits that planting trees would bring to their communities and communal green spaces. 158,000 trees were planted! This fantastic partnership programme is a great opportunity for any community group or volunteer that would like to join in and feel good by either planting trees or nominating a local community group. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/j4o4ck8>

### **What does Thetford Forest mean to you?**

The Forestry Commission would like to know what makes Thetford Forest special to you. Where do you go? What do you do? What is important to you? To take part in the survey visit <http://map-me.org/sites/thetford>

### **Could you help keep baby hedgehogs warm this winter?**

Staff and volunteers at the RSPCA's Norfolk wildlife hospital are caring for more than 70 hoglets after many of the mammals had suffered dehydration during this summer's heat spell. Staff are appealing for face flannels, which are the ideal size to tuck in the hedgehogs and keep them cosy. They are also requesting unwanted towels to help care for the 23 common seal pups currently being looked after at East Winch. Donations can be left in the yellow bins at the entrance to the site, off Station Road. Collections are also being taken by Tesco stores at Hardwick, Gaywood and Downham Market. If you see a hoglet alone during winter months and are concerned, you can find out more <http://tinyurl.com/z3nswzy>

### **Rare Arable Flowers App**

Arable wildflowers represent an important part of our cultural heritage, and the connection between these plants and traditional agriculture goes back many centuries. They also fulfil important functions, e.g. by providing food for farmland birds and for pollinating insects. However, while such wildflowers have once made our countryside colourful, many of them have substantially declined during the 20th century, due to the replacement of traditional farming methods by modern methods. The smartphone app Arable Flowers helps you identify and record rare plant species, as well as offer advice on how to look after these threatened species, find out more information <http://www.brc.ac.uk/app/rare-arable-flowers-app>

### **Flagship Pond Photo Competition**

Help the Freshwater Habitats Trust celebrate 70 Flagship Pond sites across England! The Flagship Pond mission is to protect these places by supporting the dedicated teams of people who care for them. To celebrate these Flagship Pond sites, you are invited to take photos that revel in the landscape and habitats, the plants and animals, the people and the heritage, through the seasons. Find out more here <http://tinyurl.com/z2yw2xg>

### **Stonechat colour-ringing project**

The colour-ring combination used on all stonechat nestlings at Dersingham Bog is a grey plastic ring over a metal ring on the right leg, with two colour rings on the left leg. So many young stonechats have been ringed due to an increase in breeding that the order of the rings on the right leg had to be changed in order to give us more options. So from 2016 onwards, some broods sport a metal ring over a grey plastic ring on the right leg, a reverse of the original order, as well as a variable two colour combination on the left leg. To report any ringed stonechat sightings and for more details, visit <https://northwestnorfolkstonechats.wordpress.com/>

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## WildWalk of the Month

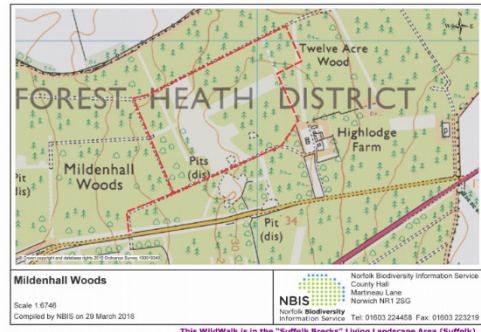
WildWalks are new way to record local wildlife. Enjoy a WildWalk in your local landscape and make a note of the wildlife you spot to upload afterwards to the WildWalks website ([www.wild-walks.org](http://www.wild-walks.org)). There are a good variety of walks on offer to encourage you to explore the local countryside or urban green space, with a range of distances and formats from circular strolls to longer distance trails. And you can even create your own.

Our WildWalk of the Month is...**Mildenhall Woods!**

This is an easy and enjoyable walk that will help you discover some of the rare wildlife that lives in the forest and learn about the importance of the warrening industry from the Middle Ages to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Find the official route description [here](#) and the recording sheet and route map to print off [here](#).

Jot down any wildlife you spot on your walk and log your sightings on the WildWalks website when you get home – find the link at [www.nbis.org.uk/breckswildwalks](http://www.nbis.org.uk/breckswildwalks)

### Mildenhall Woods 3 km (1.8 miles)



*WildWalks in the Brecks has been organised by NBIS working with Norfolk and Suffolk Wildlife Trusts and British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). All of the WildWalks for the Brecks can be found under The Brecks (for Norfolk) and Suffolk Brecks (for Suffolk) living landscape drop downs.*

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## SPECIES HIGHLIGHTS

### Common swifts set 10-month flight record en-route to southern Africa

Ubiquitous in the UK and Europe, the common swift conserves energy by riding currents of hot air and taking “power naps” as it slowly glides from high altitudes. Scientists tracked 19 swifts as they completed two of their annual migratory cycles to Central Africa via West Africa and found that three did not touch the ground, with the rest only touching the ground because of emergencies such as violent weather <http://tinyurl.com/jkzhnsu>

### New ‘Flasher’ frog species found in Australia

Named the Mahony’s Toadlet, this species startles predators by flashing its bright yellow groin allowing it to escape. The species can be found in coastal sand-bed swamps, causing restricted distribution <http://tinyurl.com/gomgxmn>

### The Great Crane Project has reported record numbers of cranes in Britain

The common crane was hunted to extinction in the 1600s, the species disappeared for more than 400 years until a number of wild cranes re-established themselves in the Norfolk Broads in 1978. There are now 48 breeding pairs following a programme to re-establish the species in wetlands <http://tinyurl.com/glzo6nf>

### Little terns still struggling in Norfolk stronghold

The little tern is one of the UK’s rarest seabirds, declining by over 27% in the past 28 years. However, Scolt Head Island was home to one of the UK’s largest colonies of little terns this year with 173 breeding pairs and 53 chicks. The success of little tern breeding relies on stable weather and no nest disturbance, making the maintenance and creation of suitable breeding grounds integral to their survival <http://tinyurl.com/zvzys3o>

### Flying squirrel numbers soar in Helsinki

Helsinki has seen a boom in the population of Siberian flying squirrels in the past two years. The biggest increase has been in the city’s wooded Central Park, where there are now twenty-five sites, compared to just six in 2014 <http://tinyurl.com/jbkamre>

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## EVENTS

### Bug Sorting Marathon 2 with FREE PIZZA, 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> January 2017, High Lodge, Thetford

Back by popular demand we will be running another bug sorting workshop on the weekend of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> January 2017! We continue to set ourselves the unique wildlife challenge of grouping invertebrates into different families (e.g. beetles, ants, spiders). The invertebrates were caught in 2016, and are sitting in storage waiting for this weekend. Each participant will take on at least two batches per day, and with the help of our on hand experienced mentors, they will split the specimens into different families. At the end of the weekend the sorted

material will be sent to experts for identification, and will contribute to forward the findings of an ongoing research project which is looking into the effects of different management techniques on Brecks biodiversity. **Feel free to join for just one of the days or both! We will be providing free pizza to keep you energised! Booking is essential, to find out more and book visit <http://tinyurl.com/j23pvcb>**

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## AND FINALLY..

**Dozens of mummified baby crocodiles surprise Dutch museum** <http://tinyurl.com/gtn444b>

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