NATURE GAZETTE

The Newsletter for Young Naturalists

May 2025

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Creatures in their Habitats, Working with Nature,
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and more...**

BNA Young Naturalists Project 2025
Creating A Wild Habitat

Project Outline

What is a Habitat:

A habitat is a natural environment which provides food, water and shelter in which flora and or fauna (or both) can survive. It could even be a log pile to encourage fungi, insects and small mammals.

Woodlands, forests, bogs, sand dunes, wetlands, roadside verges, grasslands, scrubland, moorlands are all examples of wild habitats, but there are many ways we can create our own habitat for nature. This could be a pot of nettles to encourage our brightly coloured vanessid butterflies, a window box full of nectar bearing plants, a hedgehog house or hibernaculum for hedgehogs (to hibernate in) later on, a bug hotel, bat boxes for bats to roost in, a small garden pond, you could plant some berry bearing trees and shrubs for birds or a tree for the future. These are just some examples but you may have your own idea for a project to help nature. Do send us your news and articles so we can share your projects with our other young naturalists. Idea swapping makes for great progress. We're all part of the same team.

Do submit your project write ups and pictures by February 2026 for a chance to win a prize.

How to Get Started:

Research two or three habitats and decide what you would like to do and which species you would like to encourage or increase in population. Use the project plan template below to add some notes in preparation to start your 'Create A Habitat' journal or diary.

Aim:

What kind of habitat will you create and what species do you hope to encourage or increase in population?

Method:

How will you create your habitat? Do your research. Search online, or in books or ask us for help.

What will you need? What will it cost? Draw up a plan of action. How will you record your progress? In a journal? Will you use drawings or photographs to accompany your notes?

Results:

Record your results. Did wildlife use your habitat or do you think it needs a bit longer to establish? What have you noticed? What have you learned? Are you pleased with your journal / diary?

Conclusion:

How do you feel your project went? Did you enjoy doing it? Was it worth doing and would you do it again?

Example:

Here is a great example of a wildlife garden created at RSPB Ham Wall. If you look closely you will see they have created lots of habitats. There is a pond, a hedgehog house, a stick pile, a bug hotel, a butterfly dive, compost heap, log pile and a bird feeding station all in a relatively small area – this is a winter picture taken January 2025.

Good Luck, have fun and keep in touch!

Here are the prizes you could win courtesy of Wentworth Garden Centre. Our grateful thanks to them and to Chairman Steve for organising.

If we have dificulty judging the projects because you have all done a terrific job, we will put all of your names in a hat and draw three winners.

What have you got to lose!

Creating A Habitat

By Chairman Steve

I was looking at how I could create a habitat out of things that were just lying around, and came up with an idea to collect some of the larger branches from a tree that had become dangerous and were cut down. The branches would have been taken away to be burnt, and so were perfect for my habitat project.

Deadwood is a great source of food for lots of beetles and fly grubs, but tends to be cleared away to make places look tidy. Removing this resource deprives insects of a home and food. I have seen and photographed lots of insects as I look around and under these logs, as well as mammals and amphibians. As you can see from the first photograph, I have let the grass grow long here too, and this has become another habitat.

7 Spot and Pine ladybirds

Bank Vole

Centipede

Common Shrew

Leopard Slug

Lesser Stag Beetle

Newt

Rhinocerous Beetle

Toads

Woodlouse

Coots & Moorhens

By Di Farrar MBNA

Although coots and moorhens spend much of their time in water, they are not ducks but are members of the Rail family of birds. From a distance they both look similar in size with dark coloured plumage, but there are a few differences between them and are easy to tell apart when you know what to look for.

Coot

- Coots have all black/ dark grey plumage.
- Roundish, dumpy bird with a short tail.
- They are around 38cm from the tip of the beak to the tail.
- The eyes are a stunning red colour.
- Their grey feet are huge with flaps of skin in between the toes (making them good for swimming and walking).
- The front of the face has a white 'shield' and their bills are also white tinged with pink.
- Baby coots are black with orange fluffy feathers around the face and body.

Coots are fun to watch, they do not fly very much but when they do there's a lot of flapping and splashing as they run along the water. They tend to live in groups in open water like lakes or ponds and during breeding season they can become very aggressive towards each other. There's a lot of circling around each other, spreading their wings and leaning back on them whilst kicking the opponent! They even look as if they are trying to drown each other!

They can be seen diving underwater for vegetation which they pull up above the water to eat, but will also feed on insect larvae, snails and worms.

Moorhen

- Moorhens are brownish/black with white markings along their sides. There is a white patch underneath the tail.
- Smaller in size than a coot at around 33cm.
- Also have red eyes.
- Legs are yellowish/green with a small red band at the tops. The feet are also yellowish / green with long toes.
- Moorhens faces also have a 'shield' but theirs are red, the bill is also red with a yellow tip.
- Baby moorhens are black and fluffy with a bald patch on the head.

Moorhens spend more time out of water than coots, they do usually not dive for food but wander around grass, pecking a bit like a chicken, or amongst the reeds searching for food such as small fish, snails or insects. They will even perch in branches of trees.

They have a habit of flicking their tails to warn away predators and jerk their heads forwards and backwards when swimming.

Cleavers

By Trish MacDuff ABNA

Cleavers (Galium aparine) grow all year round, but is best seen between May and September. It's commonly found in farmland, woodland and towns and gardens. It is an annual straggly climbing plant, and has hooks on its stems which helps it to climb, scrambling up other plants. The stems are slightly square.

Its leaves are whorls of eight narrow leaves in a circle formation, long stems that climb upwards. The tiny white four petalled flowers, blossom between June to August. It bears tiny round fruits from July to October, and these are also covered in velcro like hooks, and which stick to animals and humans as they pass by, thereby helping the dispersal of the seeds. Because the seeds are spread so easily, the plant is quite common place.

This plant has many regional alternative names. Stick a back, sticky bobs, kisses, goose grass, sticky weed, sticky willy, gosling weed. The names goose grass and gosling weed were given as it was used as food for geese.

White Lipped Snail

Brown Lipped Snail

White lipped snail

By Trish MacDuff ABNA

The white lipped snail (Cepaea hortensis) is slightly smaller than the brown lipped snail although it is similar in appearance. It likes to inhabit the damper places in the garden, and is very common. You will find it all year round in gardens, hedgerows woodland and waste land.

It comes in various colours, but the shells can often be yellow or pink, it can sometimes have up to five spiral brown bands around its shell, but its main identifying feature is the white band around the lip where the shell meets the body of the snail. (The brown lipped snail, has a brown lip here instead.) Its preferred diet is nettles ragwort and hogweed. It is very slow growing and has an average lifespan of around four years,

They have the sexual organs of both sexes, but need to mate so that each snail can fertilise their own eggs. The eggs are then buried in the soil. A clutch is usually around 100 eggs, each egg measuring around 2mm, and they will take around a month to hatch.

Snails prefer a damp habitat, but in the event of a dry spell, they can enter a state of aestivation, which is similar to hibernation, and tightly attach themselves to tree trunks or fences to preserve moisture. It plays a really important part in the eco system, as it helps to break down plant material, which will then return the nutrients to the soil. This helps maintain soil fertility and keep the eco system in good condition. Snails are also a food source for birds, mammals and other invertebrates.

Monarch and Viceroy Comparison with monarch on the left.

Camouflage and Mimicry: Nature's Ingenious Survival Strategies

By Roy Stewart FBNA

In the natural world, survival often hinges on an organism's ability to avoid being detected by predators or prey. Over millions of years of evolution, numerous species have developed fascinating adaptations to ensure their continued existence in their environments. Two of the most remarkable survival strategies employed by animals are **camouflage** and **mimicry**. Though both mechanisms involve deception and sometimes used interchangeably and in some instances the distinction can be blurred they are distinct in their methods and the ways in which they help organisms thrive.

Camouflage: Blending into the Environment

Camouflage refers to the ability of an organism to blend into its surroundings in such a way that it becomes difficult to detect by predators or prey. This strategy works by reducing the visual contrast between an organism and its environment, effectively hiding it in plain sight. Camouflage can be achieved through various means, including colour, pattern, texture, and even behaviour.

One of the most well-known examples of camouflage is the **peppered moth** (Biston betularia) of the United Kingdom. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the majority of these moths were light-coloured, which allowed them to blend into the lichen-covered trees where they rested. However, as industrial pollution darkened the trees, a darker, melanistic form of the moth became more common, as it was better camouflaged against the soot-covered bark. This shift, known as **industrial melanism**, is a classic example of how environmental changes can drive evolutionary adaptations in camouflage. With the introduction of cleaner industry the moths living in these areas have reverted back to their original light colour.

In addition to colour and pattern, some animals achieve camouflage through their behaviour. The **leaf-tailed gecko** of Madagascar is a prime example. This reptile has evolved to resemble a dead leaf, both in its colour and shape, and it often remains motionless to avoid detection. When disturbed, the gecko may even wave its tail like a leaf in the wind, further enhancing its disguise. Camouflage also extends to aquatic environments, where animals like **octopuses** and **cuttlefish** can change the texture and colour of their skin almost instantaneously to blend into rocky or coral-covered seabeds.

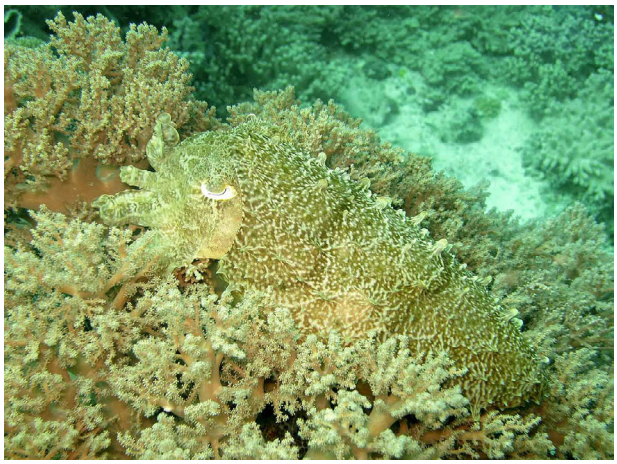
Camouflage does not only serve to hide an organism from predators. It can also function as a hunting strategy. The **praying mantis**, for example, uses its green or brown body to blend into vegetation, lying in wait for unsuspecting prey to come close enough for capture.

There are examples of birds and mammals – including the Arctic fox, willow ptarmigan and snowshoe hare – that undergo a seasonal whitening triggered by day length getting shorter. The transformation occurs as pigment disappears from fur and feathers. In mammal fur, this has the added advantage as it makes space for more air, which provides extra insulation as temperatures plummet.

It's hard to believe but the remarkable obvious striping on a zebra and spots on giant cats eg leopards are a form of disguise against their environment called disruptive camouflage. It makes a moving target much harder to observe and calculate exact positioning. This is often utilized by the military in camouflaging hardware and personnel.

Mimicry: Imitating Other Organisms

While camouflage involves blending in with the environment, mimicry takes the concept of deception one step further: organisms that practice mimicry imitate the appearance or behaviours of other organisms, often to avoid predation or to gain access to resources. Mimicry can be categorized into several types, but the major three categories include **Batesian mimicry**, **Müllerian mimicry,** and **aggressive mimicry**, each serving different purposes.



Camouflaged cuttlefish

Lizard camouflage tree

Batesian mimicry occurs when a harmless organism imitates the appearance of a harmful or poisonous one to deter predators. This was first described by the English naturalist, Henry Walter Bates whilst studying butterflies in the Amazon during the nineteenth century. A classic example is the **viceroy butterfly** (Limenitis archippus), which closely resembles the toxic **monarch butterfly** (Danaus plexippus). The bright orange and black colouration of the monarch serves as a warning to predators about its toxicity, and the viceroy capitalizes on this association by mimicking the monarch's appearance, thus gaining protection without possessing the harmful chemicals that make the monarch unpalatable. Monarchs obtain their unpleasant taste by feeding on Milkweed plants.

On the other hand, **Müllerian mimicry** involves two or more harmful or poisonous species evolving to resemble each other. This mutual resemblance benefits both species by reinforcing the warning signal to predators. For instance, many species of bees and wasps share similar black and yellow striping, signalling to predators that they are capable of stinging. By mimicking each other, these species increase the likelihood that predators will avoid them altogether, as predators learn to associate the shared colouration with danger.

Aggressive mimicry occurs when predators or parasites mimic harmless or beneficial species in order to gain an advantage. One striking example is the **anglerfish**, which uses a lure resembling a small fish or worm to attract potential prey. The anglerfish's prey, enticed by the "bait," swims closer, only to be swiftly consumed by the predator. Another example is seen in certain **cuckoo** species, which lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species, mimicking the eggs of the host birds to avoid detection and increase the likelihood that their eggs will be cared for and hatched.

It's often assumed that mimicry only occurs in animals but plants often use this adaption as well and perhaps the most celebrated examples are found in orchids where orchid flowers resemble species of insects. The classic illustration of this is found in species of the European genus Ophrys, the bee orchids where flowers resemble individuals of the female pollinating insect species.

Picture left - Bee Orchid
Picture right - Lithops herrei a stone plant

Here, males are attracted to the flowers as potential mates, and pollination occurs during 'pseudo-copulation' with the flower. The orchids actually take this to a much higher level as the flowers also release the very molecules that act as the sex pheromone that act as an attractant to the confused male insect.

Some plants use mimicry to disguise themselves as inanimate objects and this is most developed in the genus Lithops often called Stone Plants In this scenario the entire plant, not just part of it, resembles a stone and the plants are virtually impossible to spot against low-growing vegetation, particularly during the dry season, when they shrivel and often become lightly coloured and covered in sand. This makes them virtually undetectable to grazing herbivores.

The Evolutionary Significance of Camouflage and Mimicry

The evolutionary significance of camouflage and mimicry lies in their contribution to an organism's survival and reproductive success. These adaptations allow species to avoid predators, increase their chances of finding food, and, in some cases, exploit the behaviours of other organisms. The diversity of camouflage and mimicry across the animal kingdom is a testament to the power of natural selection. As predators and prey continuously evolve new strategies to outwit each other, the arms race between the two drives the development of increasingly sophisticated mechanisms of deception and defence.

For instance, as more animals develop effective camouflage, predators also evolve more acute senses or behaviours to detect hidden prey. Similarly, as mimicry strategies become more widespread, predators may become more discerning, leading to a continuous cycle of adaptation.

Conclusion

Camouflage and mimicry represent two of nature's most ingenious strategies for survival. While camouflage helps organisms evade detection by blending into their surroundings, mimicry offers a more complex form of deception, allowing organisms to imitate other species or objects to gain protection or resources. Both strategies highlight the incredible ways in which life on Earth has adapted to the pressures of predation and competition. Whether through blending in or pretending to be something else, camouflage and mimicry are clear examples of how organisms use innovation to ensure their survival in a complex and ever-changing world.

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Black and White Photography

Words and Pictures by Robin Beer

What I like about black and white photography in particular is the clarity and atmosphere that it provides, there's a great deal that can be done with shades, exposure variation, composition etc.

Early inspirations have been the old silent movies, and film noir. Later, the work of photographers like Ansel Adams had an impact.

In comparison, colour photography is still something I do a lot of, and it's a natural choice for some types of work such as flower and insect photography. I find that black and white allows me to focus more narrowly though, and to really work on bringing out textures and capturing a sense of atmosphere.

Curlew on river taw - Devon

I don't know that there's any one thing that makes black and white special for me, I've always been drawn to it though, even when I was starting out.

With regards to the equipment / camera gear I use - I had been using a Pentax K3 with a 50mm f 1.8 standard lens, and a 28 mm wide angle for most of my photos. I also have a couple of zoom lenses and a macro lens for insects/flowers. I recently sold my old equipment, to pick up a newer mirrorless camera, a Canon RP. I just have a standard lens for it at the moment, but will save up for a macro and wide angle lens at some point.

Braunton, Devon - swan with mallard ducks

DSLR cameras are still excellent. However, support has been moving over to mirrorless systems so I decided to make the switch now that a greater range of lenses is being made available.

I have had photos exhibited locally in the past, including at the North Devon Museum, but nothing since the Pandemic. I'm not sure about exhibiting again at the moment, but perhaps in the future. I have done photo-shoots for people over the years, mostly live events work, but don't sell prints at the current time.

Hartland, Devon

If I were to advise a young naturalist on how to begin a hobby in photography, depending on budget you can start with most entry level DSLR or Mirrorless cameras. You only need 1 lens to get going, a standard lens will be enough, or perhaps a wide angle if you're more interested in landscape work. There are some good macro standard lenses about if you want to try close up work.

The quality of newer zooms is also better than in the past, so a budget zoom lens may be a good starting option as well, but I still think a fixed lens with a fast aperture (f 1.8 say for a 50mm) opens up a lot of possibilities.

I'd practice using the camera on manual mode for exposures to start with, and just experiment in general.

There are a number of free photo editing programs out there, so I'd look into those before spending out on a subscription service, at least to start with. RawTherapee and GIMP are both free and comprehensive programs.

Kingfisher by River Taw

Crow near Valley of the Rocks, Lynton, Devon

Near Valley of the Rocks, Lynton, Devon

Crow - Hunters Inn, Parracombe, Devon

Woody Bay, Devon

Sheep - The Valley of Rocks, Lynton, Devon

Creatures in their habitats

By Elizabeth Fowler and Carol King

Every living thing has a particular niche place in nature, they overlap and move between environments, but mostly they are grounded in their own habitat and that is where you need to look for them. No point in looking in trees for rabbits, or in holes in the ground for butterflies.

All life forms have the same basic needs of oxygen, food, a place to breed and raise young.
One interesting habitat is rocky shorelines between high and low tide. A mix of rocks, sand, pebbles, seawater pools and seaweeds which is covered twice a day by the tide it supports a surprising number of life forms.

Sandcastle or honeycombe worm

Sabellaria alveolata is a ringed worm that lives in small tubes, which form reefs. The tubes are built from shell fragments or sand which protect the worm from predators and can be repaired if damaged near the entrance. The tube is made up of a number of overlapping layers of material glued together with mucus. There are two sexes and spawning takes place in the spring and again in the autumn. The larvae develop in the water column and can detect the substance the adults use to bind their tubes and follow this to find a location to settle on.

They are filter feeders and use cilia covered tentacles to extract food from the water. The tubes are arranged in close proximity and have a distinctive honeycomb-like appearance. These reefs range from 30 centimetres to 2 metres thick and take the form of hummocks, sheets or more massive formations and do a lot to encourage biodiversity. The adult worm size ranges from 30 to 40 millimetres.

Limpets

Using its muscular foot, the common limpet is able to form such a tight bond to its home rocks that it is very difficult to pry off, protecting it from crashing waves, strong coastal currents and predators. The shell is shaped in such a way that it is difficult to grasp and it is thick enough to be difficult to break. Also the tight seal prevents the limpet from drying out in the sun.

Common limpets are herbivorous, but they also eat young barnacles. They feed by scraping the rock's surface with a strong, toothy organ called a radula cleaning the rocks in a relatively short period of time.

The teeth constantly wear away and are replaced. They move around over the rocks when the tide is in, but always return to their own favourite spot when the tide goes out, following the mucus trail that they have deposited. This spot becomes worn by the edges of the shell, and eventually an obvious 'scar' in the rock is created. Limpets may live for 16 years and reproduce by broadcast spawning, where several females release eggs and several males release sperm into the water at the same time.

Oystercatcher

This is a wading shore line bird, never far from the water and often in large flocks which can be up to thousands. It is found on the sea shore, islands and estuaries. Capable of swimming, it stays in sight of land, often seen feeding at the waters edge on crustaceans having developed a very strong bill and neck for chiselling off and opening shells.

When this food is unavailable they will also move inland to near fields and take worms. They have a strong straight flight and often call while flying. They also nest close to the shore, usually in a shallow scrape which makes them particularly vulnerable to disturbance by people and dogs. Three blotched eggs are laid and hatch in 24 to 27 days and the young fledge after about five weeks. The parent bird will try to distract predators away from the nest. Adult birds are a very distinctive black and white with a long bright orange bill.

Still at the waters edge but this creature breeds underground....

Puffin

Puffins spend a large part of their year out at sea but come ashore in spring to breed, returning yearly to a favourite hole in the ground that is often an old rabbit burrow. They form large colonies in suitable habitats, frequently at the top of cliffs, close to the sea and the needed source of small fish. They are extremely good underwater swimmers and their bills have a series of serrations that hold small fish in place so that they come ashore with beaks stuffed with fish for the young.

When not on duty they loaf around in what looks like chattering groups as they are very gregarious and they appear to gossip with each other when coming in from the sea before disappearing down their burrows. Breeding underground helps protect them from predation by bigger gulls, but unfortunately does not protect the eggs and young from rats. The removal of rats on Lundy has allowed the puffins to successfully breed again on the island.

Mole

Moles have evolved to live almost entirely underground in the dark, hence they have tiny eyes and use their nose and sensitive whiskers to find their way around, even having whiskers on their tails so they can find their way backwards.

Moles have large, strong, clawed front feet that they use to dig tunnels about 5cm in diameter, which can be up to 200 metres long, with the excavated soil pushed up into the familiar mole hills. They feed on insects and worms underground which they feel for in the tunnels, but if it is very dry they will venture out at night to hunt but this leaves them exposed to owls.

The only other time they are out is to collect leaves and grass for bedding in the nest where they raise their young. The mole hill above a nest is larger than normal. Apart from a brief spring mating they are very aggressive and chase any other moles from their territory.

Being nocturnal and underground dwelling you are unlikely to actually see a live mole.

Dor beetle

Geotrupes stercorarius is a species of earth-boring dung beetle. Its common name is the dor beetle, or, the dumbledore. The upper surface of the body has a metallic blue sheen and the underside a bright metallic blue or violet. The beetle feeds on the droppings of herbivorous animals mainly horse and cow so is found on grass pasture with adults appearing from April or May. They create a chirping sound with their hind legs.

Mating occurs in the spring and both sexes dig a vertical burrow directly beneath the pile of dung. This may be up to 50cm deep and the female will begin at the base and dig a series of horizontal brood chambers, each will be provided with dung and a single egg before being sealed with soil from the next chamber. Larvae develop through the summer and some will pupate and produce adults in the autumn that will feed and then overwinter in the burrows, while others will remain within the brood chambers and pupate in the spring to produce slightly later adults.

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The Environment Today

by Endymion Beer MBNA

Elizabeth Fowler is a member of the Taw and Exmoor branch. She has been investigating the environmental effects of spot on flea and tick treatment popular for use on cats and dogs. Did you know that neonicotinoides are used in these treatments! When dogs play in waterways, residue from this washes off into the water and contamination occurs in the waterways. when you consider how many of us own dogs, you can begin to picture the scale of the problem.

Neonicotinoides are also used on lawns, golf courses and were developed in the 1990s. Not only does the substance kill pest species, but also bees, butterflies and other insects by over stimulating and destroying the nervous system. Even at non critical levels neonicotinoides weaken the immune system, stamina, memory and fertility.

Once in the soil neonics remain active for 5 years and as a result, rain, and irrigation can wash these pollutants to new habitats - this doesn't stop with insect life, it causes harm to other wildlife too, particularly to those that drink contaminated water, predate insects and it can collapse fish populations.

However, there is a safer way forward.

Credilio is a chewable tablet available to cats and dogs in the prevention of flea and ticks. Neonicotinoides are not used in the tablet and there is no residue to wash off in waterways.It is much safer to use.

Please spread the word and avoid the use of Neonicotinoides! Our thanks to Liz (pictured right) for her research and continuing the fight against these truly awful chemicals.

For more information see: 1) https://youtu.be/u-4XVdVrv31
2) www.nrok.org/stories/neonicotinoides-10-effects-humans-bees#

Working with Nature

Looking at careers and talking with people who are actively working with nature from all walks of life - This time, we talked with two very different personalities. Firstly let me introduce you to
Bec Newell BVSc BSC MRCVS Veterinary Surgeon.

Bec Newell is a Veterinary Surgeon for Market Vets branch in Barnstaple, Devon. She has been a part of the team since 2015. Currently, Bec works with pets only now. She said:

"I love my job as it's so varied. Consulting on a range of medical issues and also training, behaviour and husbandy. Sometimes I operate or perform dentals under anaesthetic."

I asked Bec if she had been interested in natural history and animals from a young age. Bec grew up in the countryside and always appreciated being surrounded by nature. Today she enjoys walking and running the North Devon Coastline. Bec has been interested in Nature and animals ever since she could remember. Even when she was a youngster she recalls preferring her stuffed bears and dogs to dolls.

Bec said said:

"I always wanted to be a vet. I think James Herriott had a lot to do with it!"

Bec graduated from Liverpool Univrsity in 1995 she was interested in all aspects of working with small animals with a particular interest in internal medicine. Looking back, there isn't anything she would change about her choices or career path.

What advice would Bec offer a young naturalist seeking a career path?

"Go for it! Find out what you're passionate about and then try your best to make that happen. You might not end up doing exactly what you were aiming for but you hopefully will find a job that fulfills you and feels meaningful."

I asked Bec, if she had the power to change one thing to help nature, what it would be why? She said:

"I would stop intensive farming of all types."

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We are very grateful to Bec for her time in chatting with us, and wish her all the best of luck and continued success with her work. Her expertise and dedication is simply invaluable and any animal that passes through her hands is a lucky animals indeed.

Working with Nature

Looking at careers and talking with people who are actively working with nature from all walks of life - This time, we talked with two very different personalities. Our second interview is with

Samantha Norris Warden, Knettishall Heath nature reserve, Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

My role involves the daily management of the reserve, including habitat management, species recording, livestock handling, volunteer management and visitor engagement. Every day is different whether it be running a volunteer working party to thin out scrub growing on heathland, running a guided walk or developing a management plan.

The job allows me to learn new things on a daily basis, such as habitat preferences of breeding birds in a survey, or joining experts on a botanical survey. I enjoy being able to learn new species on the job, constantly dipping into different taxas depending on what we find and survey through our management.

I have always had a passion for the outdoors, playing in nature as a child and getting hands on with bugs and beasties in the garden or the local woods. I have always been most happiest when outside.

I spent a lot of time on Exmoor at my grandparents bed and breakfast, and on my other Grandads farm in the fens of east Anglia as a child. Both of these experiences fostered a love for the natural world and the animal kingdom, and a need to be close to wildlife. Both my parents and grandparents helped me to learn different species as a child, whether it was birds on the feeder, pond dipping in the garden pond or going for long walks wildlife spotting.

By teenage hood I had a strong desire to work outside and to protect the natural world. There are so many possibilities and career paths that can achieve these goals, but my desire to make a difference on the larger scale meant that working in conservation and ecology felt a natural step. I felt that by helping to manage habitats on a wider scale it would help huge ranges of species and have impacts on whole ecosystems. I went for a degree in Animal Management and Conservation, and then had the fantastic opportunity to take a year long internship with Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. I picked up so many skills ranging from breeding bird surveys, running guided walks to fenland management and livestock handling. Gaining this on the ground experience was pivotal in enabling me to pursue a full-time career in nature reserve management.

So is there anything I would have done differently? I would have liked to have taken the opportunity to explore different career options. At the time I didn't know much about the career paths in ecology, and now I very much admire the good work that is done for example in mitigating impacts of new housing projects, either through protection of species they can displace, or the innovative solutions being developed to make new houses and communities wildlife friendly. I would tell my younger self now to take the time to research all the possibilities, it may not have changed my career path, as I love what I do, but it would certainly have helped develop my wider understanding of how those of us working to protect nature can all work together.

P.T.O

Working with Nature continued.....

We asked Samantha what advice she would give to a young naturalist seeking a career path. This is what she said;

Explore the different options available to you, whether it be through studying opportunities, volunteering or being involved in communities like the BNA. Make the most of opportunities to work or learn alongside experts in their fields. Doing a degree isn't always necessary, many organisations and NGO's offer internships or apprenticeships which offer fantastic prospects to learn on the job. Most importantly, do what you enjoy and you will thrive!

If there is anything I still hope to achieve, I would like to work on a species project at some point and have the opportunity to hone my ecology skills. I am passionate about delving further into botany and entomology, but as a reserve warden you have to have a good all round general knowledge, so I'm hoping to focus on one area at some point and really develop my knowledge further.

If I had the power to change one thing to help nature, I strongly feel that a wider understanding of the natural world and better recognition of our local species should be taught more in schools. I feel this would help our general population in the UK to place greater value on our wild spaces, and protect them in everything we do, from construction to farming to the legal protections we can offer.

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Our grateful thanks to Samantha Norris for her inspring interview. Do go and say hello to her if you are planning to visit Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Knettishall Heath nature reserve. Location pictures below courtesy of Steve and Pauline Rutherford.

Beevive review

Words and pictures by Teddy Guymer.

The Beevive Kit is a keyring device designed to help tired bees by giving them an energy-boosting sugar solution. They are then able to continue their essential role in pollination. The kit is a small glass vial that inserts into a tube container with a screw-on lid. This container attaches to a keyring so that it is available when encountering an exhausted bee.

The design is quite compact and will easily fit into a pocket or attach to a set of keys or a bag. The vial contained within the container is reusable so that it can be filled again with a sugary solution to offer to the tired bee.

I have the bamboo container version, but it does come in metal versions too. It was bought through the RSPB online shop.

I am still waiting to test out the effectiveness of the Beevive kit as I have yet to find a bee that is in need of it. But I will keep it handy just in case I do come across an exhausted bee that is too tired to do what it does best – pollinate.

The Young Naturalists' Hub

Forgotten Flowers

Words by Pippa Woodley and Pictures by Pauline Rutherford.

Many people know the importance of bee-friendly plants, such as lavender, foxgloves and sunflowers. They are usually beautiful and brightly coloured and look great in your garden; but are they actually the best source of pollen and nectar that bees forage from?

Although these plants are great for bees, bees actually prefer many different flowers and plants that we may have forgotten about or see as pests.
For example, during the Spring months of March, April and May, bees mainly forage on dandelions, blackthorns, bluebells and holly. These plants are incredibly important to bees during this time of year because they provide an abundant supply of pollen and nectar for them to collect.
During the summer months (June, July and August), bees also enjoy poppy, hogweed, bell heather and white clover. And even in the Autumn and Winter months, plants such as ivy, ling heather and old man's beard play a massive role in the survival of bees.

As you can see, many of these plants are classed as weeds or a nuisance as they don't look very pretty and grow everywhere; but they actually play an important role in supplying bees with the right amount of nectar and pollen. They all contain a plentiful supply of protein-rich pollen and nectar which are full of carbohydrates and essential for the survival of bees and their colonies.

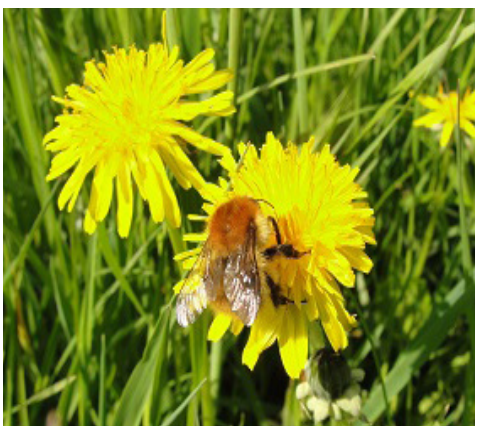
So next time you do some gardening or even going for a walk, make sure you stop and think before pulling out any 'weeds'!

Wild Clematis - Travellers Joy - Old Man's Beard

White Clover

Red Tailed Bee

Autumn and Winter Ivy



Carder Bee

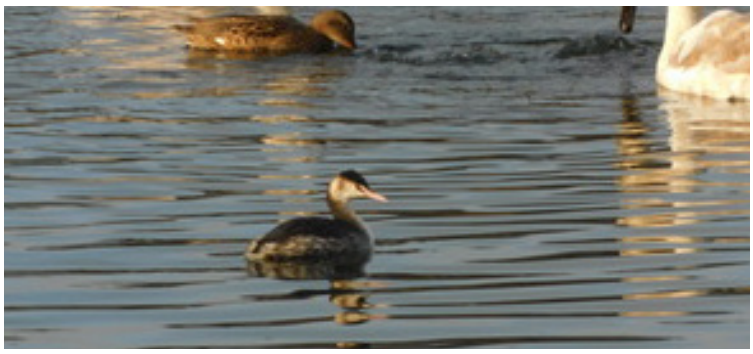
The Young Naturalists' Hub

A warm welcome to Declan Delaney
our newest young naturalist.

Biography - Words and pictures by Declan.

I'm Declan Delaney. I'm really happy to be a member of the Young Naturalists! I love wildlife, especially birds. I enjoy taking photos of them. My favourite birds are the Great Crested Grebe, Nuthatch and the Green Woodpecker. I'm attaching some favourite photos.

I also have a night camera and see foxes, hedgehogs and mice regularly. We've even had a muntjac deer and a badger!
I'm looking forward to learning more about wildlife!

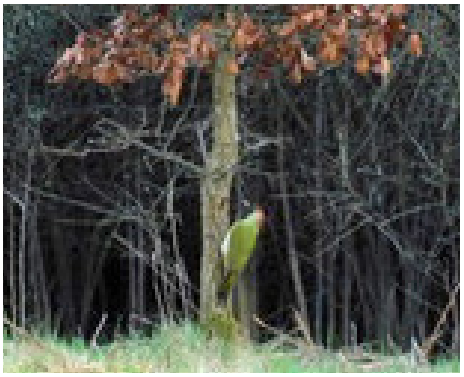


Great Crested Grebe

Declan birdwatching

Long tailed tit

Redwing



Green Woodpecker

Robin

Male Stonechat

Roman snails

Words and Text by Arthur Tweed

On the 15th of February, me, my parents and my sister did a 5 mile walk on Bacombe Hill in Wendover. It is known for the roman snails you can find there. Sadly, they are quite rare in Britain, and most are just the remnants of their shells. They are a protected species.

Last year, I did the exact same route and found about 3 roman snails but, on my most recent walk I only found 2 empty shells. They can vary in size from 5 cm across to 8 cm across. They are easy to spot because most are white with brown stripes and do not blend in with the undergrowth. This makes them vulnerable to hungry birds.

The Young Naturalists' Hub

Pictured here - Some of our young naturalists with their newly acquired Recorders Badges. Congratulations!

Leah Reid

Rose Scoble

Beatrix Womersley

Jonathan Sullivan

Freddie Scoble

Ethan Caroll

James Wilkins

Contributors please note:

If you are a contributor, or would like to submit articles and pictures for consideration, the **deadline** for the Nature Gazette due out in August will be **July 15th 2025**
Please send to bna.zoom.talks@gmail.com
Thank you for your support!

Do you have a query?
email: info@bna-naturalists.org or bna.zoom.talks@gmail.com
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