



# THANET COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

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## *Conservation and Education*

### Members Newsletter June 2018

Monkton Nature Reserve is open seven days a week from 10am – 5pm until October, when we will go back to 3pm closing. Walk the nature trails and have a browse around our museum and second-hand bookshop. If the flag is flying, we are open!

## Wildlife Matters at Monkton



Baby wildlife season has begun and the Reserve is full of fledglings chattering at their parents for food, fox cubs frolicking in the early morning sun and young rabbits darting across the paths as you wander past. The poor moorhen family have had their seven chicks slowly picked off by hungry bird of prey parents, and now only two remain. But the news isn't all bad – the female moorhen has been rebuilding her nest for her

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second brood, with the male haphazardly adding reeds to the outside of the mountainous nest. Let's hope this brood is a little more successful!

We have a camera in the kestrel nest and we've watched as the five eggs have hatched. Normally, the kestrels fledge three chicks, so we're interested to see if all the chicks survive and this is perhaps a good year for them. Highlights can be viewed on [YouTube](#).

Kashmir – Environmental Education Officer

## Open Day

Last month we had our annual Open Day, the biggest event on our calendar and boy, was it busy! Reports from visitors said the cars were parked from the Reserve entrance up to Orchard Lane, over sixty vehicles long!

We had a number of stalls for visitors, including stalls from [RSPB](#), [Thanet Beekeepers](#) and [Thanet Coastal Project](#). We also ran activities such as pond dipping, as well as opportunities to see birds of prey. We had live music from 6&8 Acoustic which people could listen (and sing along) to, whilst eating delicious homemade cakes from the café. We had our tombola, which was as popular as ever – there was even a queue at one point! Over two hundred prizes were donated to the tombola and by the end of the day, there was just six prizes left!



The astronomers also opened up the observatory for visitors to have a look at the telescopes, and we had an exclusive nature trail, where children could spot wooden animals and insects.

We'd like to thank everyone who came along, volunteered, donated cakes and tombola prizes and made this such a successful day!

Kashmir – Environmental Education Officer

# Turtle Dove Conservation



Turtle doves are the UK's fastest declining bird species with a 91% population decline from 1995 to 2013. Turtle doves are ecologically unique as they are Europe's only long distance migratory dove, spending two-thirds of the year in their non-breeding grounds in sub-Saharan Africa.

At the Reserve, we get a breeding pair of turtle doves each year, but this year we wanted to be more proactive in our conservation efforts for these beautiful, and increasing rare, birds. We have teamed up with [Operation Turtle Dove](#) to offer supplementary feeding to the doves onsite.

Studies have shown that loss of suitable habitat, and therefore loss of food sources, in both breeding and non-breeding grounds, has been the most important factor in driving their declines. Even when they manage to breed, they are producing half as many chicks as they were in the 1970's, pointing to the theory that providing extra food sources may help to boost numbers, as a short-term solution.

Long-term solutions will be to increase permanent and suitable habitats where the turtle doves will have abundant access to their natural food sources, but these habitats are going to take time to establish, so a short-term solution is needed to keep numbers afloat.

We have been monitoring the turtle doves, as well as which birds have been feeding on the supplementary seed, with the help from a University of Kent Masters student, Sam Scott.

We are hoping that with increased effort, we can attract new pairs into the area, and become part of the solution to halting, and even reversing turtle dove declines.

Kashmir – Environmental Education Officer

## Astronomy Dome Repairs



As we write, the main observatory at the Reserve is receiving some much needed TLC. Areas of rotting wood needed to be repaired, and the dome needed cleaning of lichen and repainting where the paint work was chipping off.

Local power generation firm Cummins offered to carry out the work for us. The work has started this month, with scaffolding being erected around the back of the observatory.

The work will include fixing the rotting runners that the dome revolves on, as well as repairing rotting patches on the weather skirt. Even painting the dome isn't a small task, the skin is a fibreglass coating, therefore specialist gel coating needs to be used.

There is also the possibility that Cummins may be able to motorise the shutters, making it easier to rotate the dome electronically, rather than manually pushing it around!

The repairs should be ready for the next astronomy viewing event, which will be held on the Friday 24<sup>th</sup> August (dependant on the weather though, of course!).

Kashmir – Environmental Education Officer

## Moths and Newts

Once the weather began to warm up after the 'Beast from the East', we resumed our mothing surveys. The nights were still a little cold but we did manage to record two new species for our recent records: the small elephant hawkmoth, (*Deiliphila porcellus*), photographed below, and alder kitten, (*Furcula bicuspis*).



Our aim over the next couple of years is to make these nights accessible to members first and then to the general public for interest and to learn about the 'goings on' at the Reserve after dark.

We also survey our bats and newt populations and are attempting to work on gaining more accurate data about the bats that roost, hunt and, hopefully, nest on site. We use bat detectors to work out their hunting patterns. Of course, it's difficult to see in the dark, but following with a bat detector, a rough picture can be drawn up on their movements regarding height and speed and whether they are circling trees, flitting along hedgerows or diving from tree tops.

Anyone who watched Springwatch this year and saw our clip will have heard about our enormous population of great crested newts. Over a period of a few weeks, during the slight flooding, we counted over four hundred in Dragonfly Pond. Everywhere we looked on the flooded plain were newts. According to Kent Amphibian and Reptile Group (KRAG), this was the largest population recorded in Kent this year. Newts spend the majority of their time hunting on land. They are only in the pond when they are juveniles and return to the water to mate and for the females to lay their eggs. The female will lay about 250 eggs, individually, during the mating season. Each egg is wrapped in a leaf underwater, using her rear feet to turn and curl the leaf around the egg.

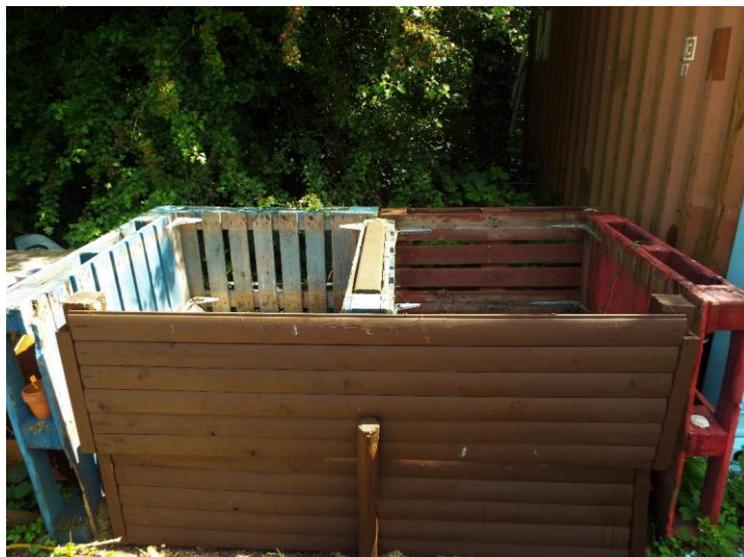
Once the weather cools, newts will search for somewhere safe to hide away for the winter, in crevices, the chalk scree or even leaf litter. Reptiles do not hibernate, like a

mammal, but, instead, brumate. They enter a lethargic state, perhaps not moving until the weather warms months later.

We hope over the next year or two to contact local landowners and those with ponds on their land, to be allowed to survey across the Isle of Thanet. A survey of newts across Thanet has never been done before and it would be interesting to see their range and population levels across the Isle.

Peter – Volunteer

## Composting and Compost Heaps



Back in the 1990s and 2000s, TV programmes like Ground Force showed that it was possible to create 'wildlife friendly' gardens, even in small spaces. The programmes gave inspiration to millions. However, wildlife friendly green 'waste' is still being discarded.

Lawn cuttings, leaf litter, pruned shrubs and fruit tree waste are full of nutrients which can be returned to the soil. Food waste can be added and even cardboard boxes (with all tape and plastic labels removed) can be torn up and added to the mix and layered between the green waste. Covering the heap with an old carpet will keep the heat and moisture in. Once composted, use the green waste to rejuvenate the soil in your borders, pot plants, fruit and vegetable plots.

Whilst it can be impractical to compost large branches, they can be used to create log piles in a secluded area of the garden. These piles create mini beast habitats, which, in turn, will attract mammals and birds to feed on the insects.

We are creating new compost heaps at the front of the Reserve along with posters informing about the benefits of composting.

For more information on the wonders of composting, please visit the links below:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=444>

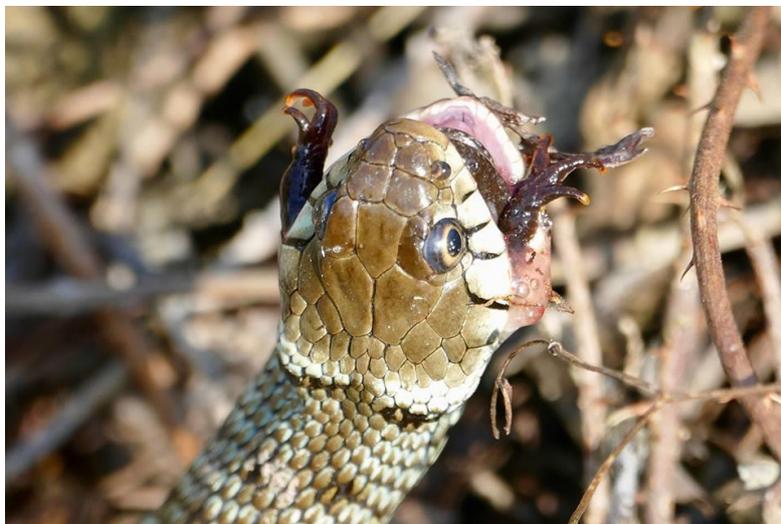
<https://www.businesswaste.co.uk/97-of-uk-households-dont-compost-britain-forgets-the-art-of-composting/>

Peter – Volunteer

## MNR on BBC Springwatch

Some of you may have seen that Monkton Nature Reserve featured in episode 8 of the recent BBC Springwatch series. Cameraman Richard Taylor-Jones along with local conservationist Keith Ross spent four days at the Reserve filming what became a 4-5 minute article for the programme.

The story begins with Richard 'following' a kestrel back to its nest here at the Reserve, and then being intrigued by its location, surrounded as it is by wildlife unfriendly farmland. The focus then shifts to one of our grass snakes as it hunts a great crested newt, using footage which Richard said has never before been filmed by a BBC cameraman. The epic struggle between the two animals, which, he tells, lasted for fifteen minutes, ends when the snake finally manages to manoeuvre the doomed newt head first into its mouth and swallows it whole.



A final night-time sequence of stars rotating above the observatories and reference to three species of bats we have resident here, ends with Richard leaving the darkened Reserve expressing apprehension about whether nature will inevitably become confined to such places as we have here at Monkton.

Martin - Assistant Manager

*We are pleased to say that Monkton Nature Reserve is one of the charities being supported by Waitrose Ramsgate during the month of July. So please make sure you ask for your tokens at the till and then pop them in the Monkton slot! Being a charity, we rely on donations to support the work we do and just by shopping at Waitrose in July will help us. Thank you*

## **From the Trustees**

The Trustees are pleased to tell Members that Andrew Ogden has kindly agreed to join the Board. Since beginning his association with the Trust as our first Education Officer, funded by the Nineveh Trust, Andrew has contributed in numerous ways to the on-going developments at Monkton Nature Reserve, most recently as hon. Treasurer, but also with the refurbishment of the FSC, mains electricity supply and the drains (a particular interest of his – which he may be induced to enlarge on in a future newsletter!).

Kashmir Flint succeeded Andrew as our Education Officer, but now, sadly, as you will read below, she is off to pastures new (although I heard somewhere that she was working at Costa Canterbury shortly before she joined us?) in Costa Rica.

Thanet Countryside Trust must live within its means, but thanks to our Membership resources and additional grant funding we were able to continue Kashmir's employment beyond the term of the Nineveh grant.

In order to maintain the momentum of her work, and also to keep the Reserve open for 7 days a week, bearing in mind our Warden, Dave Edgar, has also begun to enjoy semi-retirement, we shall shortly be announcing temporary appointments to cover this shortfall.

In the meantime, if any Members know of suitably qualified and experienced individuals who might be interested in working for the Trust, please ask them to get in touch.

Steve Villette - Trustee

## Bon Voyage, Kashmir

Finally, sadly for all of us here at the Reserve, we are saying farewell to Kashmir, who, after 2 years as our Environmental Education Officer, is moving on to take up a fresh challenge. At the beginning of July, she is going to do volunteering work in Costa Rica for the Ara Project, which is dedicated to saving that country's two native species of macaw.



In the time she has been with us she has increased our education profile among local schools by contacting them and co-ordinating their visits. This is no easy task, as schools will often need to alter their initial requested dates, meaning Kashmir had to check on the continued availability of our own volunteers. She also stepped in to take on the responsibility of becoming one of three wardens who are tasked with managing the Reserve on a day-to-day basis. Kashmir has been instrumental in initiating many of the courses and presentations which have been held, or are still forthcoming, at the Reserve. She also took a lead role in revitalising our reception area and the associated shop section resulting in an increase in much needed income.

Her passion and enthusiasm and her knowledge regarding wildlife and the broader subject of environmental issues have been a great asset to the Reserve and her input on all these matters will be greatly missed.

All of us at Monkton Nature Reserve wish Kashmir the very best for the future.

Martin – Assistant Manager