

Hertfordshire Life

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INSECT WATCH

Herts residents are being asked to be on the lookout for two insects this summer. The oak processionary moth, accidentally introduced to the UK, is rare in the county but the caterpillar has hairs which can cause skin conditions, irritation to eyes and throat and, in severe cases, breathing difficulties and allergic reactions in people and pets. The adult moths are harmless and have a habit of crawling in long lines, nose to tail, around oak trees. The Forestry Commission advice is to avoid the caterpillars but report them via its 'tree alert' on forestryresearch.gov.uk

The People's Trust for Endangered Species and Royal Holloway University have launched a national survey to conserve the beautiful but threatened noble chafer beetle. Volunteers are asked to set up a harmless trap to attract the iridescent green insect, before photographing any and releasing them. The insect, listed as 'vulnerable', is threatened by the loss of its traditional habitat – the deadwood at the heart of old trees. To take part, contact d.harvey@rhul.ac.uk



HMWT

Longhorns born in park

Panshanger Park has welcomed five longhorn calves, the first of 16 expected, after the breed was introduced to the nature reserve near Hertford in April.

The ancient breed provides low intensity grazing and plays a key role in naturally maintaining grasslands, controlling plants that could dominate, and giving wildflowers a better chance of spreading. The cows also support biodiversity as bare ground where they have trampled becomes microclimates for hunting insects, nesting and allowing seedlings to establish.

The cattle belong to newly appointed park managers Maydencroft who are supporting Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and park owners Tarmac. The park was once part of a grand estate sculpted by

18th century landscape designer, Humphry Repton.

Enrique Moranmontero, Tarmac restoration manager at Panshanger, said the team was delighted at the arrival of the calves. 'It's so exciting to see Repton's vision for longhorn at Panshanger Park coming to life in this way. Once we get the cows out to graze the land, their role will help increase the diversity of plant species we have, which has a really positive knock-on-effect for animals like butterflies, bees, bats and birds. The benefits from grazing are great and we're certain visitors to the park will very much enjoy seeing the calves too.'

A Festival of Wildlife takes place in the park on July 27-28 with guided walks, talks and kids activities. See p84 for more.

ED HUTCHINGS' BIRD OF THE MONTH

Red list yellowhammer

Some say the yellowhammer's song is 'a-little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheese'. It requires a bit of imagination to equate this to the bird's simple repetition of a single note – 'chiz-iz-iz-iz-iz-zeee'.

Yellowhammers were common in areas of grassland, and fields with hedgerows, in fact almost any open area with low cover but few trees – yet its recent population decline makes it a red list species. Like other buntings, it feeds mainly on the ground, but perches on bushes and telegraph wires to deliver its song at intervals, from February to the end of

August. Breeding starts from the end of April; the courtship is a boisterous, madcap affair with the male hotly pursuing the female in a headlong, twisting flight that often ends with both birds tumbling through branches in a flurry of feathers.

The nest, built by the female, is a neat cup of grasses, moss and plant stems lined with grass and hair. It is generally built on the ground in cover and concealed by overhanging plants. The three or four eggs are white, sometimes with a hint of purple, with bold scribbles; giving it the name of 'scribble lark' in some areas.



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