Alderney Wildlife

SURVIVING WINTER
How some plants cope with winter and how you can use them to help other wildlife

PORCUPINES IN ALDERNEY
Some beautiful images of species recorded during the Porcupine Marine Natural History Society field trip

Autumn/Winter 2024 | Survival

Protecting Alderney's wildlife for the future

Welcome

I recently came across a humourous take on winter in the Northern Hemisphere: "Since the clocks go back one hour, it's morning until 2 PM, and then it's night." With limited daylight hours, darkness seems to creep in quickly. If I want to catch a glimpse of winter wildlife, I'll need to brave the cold and head out for a brisk walk.

Here on Alderney, I've been warned about the infamous February blues, often labeled "the most miserable month of the year." Winter can feel long and relentless, with wet and cold conditions for us—and harsh survival challenges for wildlife. But that's the balance of nature, isn't it?

With Survival as this issue's theme, you'll discover fascinating insights into how plants survive winter, from shedding leaves to going dormant, along with suggestions for ways we can use specific plants to support wildlife during this food-scarce season. Another article explores the clever camouflage tactics animals use to evade predators and outsmart prey—essential for increasing their chances of survival.

Turning to butterflies, this year hasn't been great for them across the UK. But has that been the case for Alderney? Please turn to pages 12-13 for trends in butterfly populations and changes observed over the past few years.

Elsewhere in this issue, enjoy stunning photographs from the Porcupine Marine Natural History Society field trip and take a look back at the remarkable evolution of Alderney's nature reserves over the past 22 years.

HAWTHORN | CHARLIE CANTRILL FROM PEXELS.COM

COMMUNITY OF FILTER FEEDERS INCLUDING SPONGES AND SOFT CORALS | IAIN DIXON

For the Visit a UK Nature Reserve article, I'm delighted to include a contributed piece of writing from the Friends of Low Hall National Nature Reserve, showcasing their beautiful, wildlife-rich reserve.

By the time you receive this magazine, it'll be the start of a new year. On behalf of the team, I'd like to send you our warmest wishes. May the year ahead be bright and full of positive changes. Thank you so much for your continued support—it truly means the world to us.

Stay safe and warm this winter, and I hope you'll enjoy the read!

Thanh Doan
Outreach and Education Officer

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JUMBLE SALE VOLUNTEERS IN 2024 | THANH DOAN

Volunteering: The heart of Alderney

Alderney is a very special community for many reasons, but the strength and depth of community volunteering is to me one of its 'most' special aspects.

Whilst some did not see the value of the recent Charities' Fayre that took place in September at the Island Hall, the opportunity to spend time with the volunteers of the 28 charities attending was a real pleasure. It also brought to me a realisation which may be obvious to many but is not something I have ever really dwelled upon before! This was the common origin of nearly all of Alderney's voluntary-run organisations in that they were almost all founded by volunteers in response to a challenge which would not have been resolved without their help. So much of our society, from arts, sport and culture, to support for the young, old and those with mental health issues, as well as the care of animals, wildlife and heritage, relies to some extent on the services provided by volunteers. Given Alderney's size and resources this is likely to always be the case.

In 2001, I was lucky enough to be part of a community organising project. Back then, the future of Alderney's countryside and wild spaces was a common concern. Following the mid 1990's recession the last remaining farm on Alderney had been thought lost, much of the island's footpath network was inaccessible and ragwort abounded. Community concern reached a head, and a meeting was convened between the States of Alderney, charities and volunteers. From this a set of 'common problems' was identified and a solution proposed, which was then put to a public meeting, and from this the Wildlife Trust was founded. This whole process was driven by community need and was delivered through

JUMBLE SALE VOLUNTEERS IN 2024 | THANH DOAN

the efforts of volunteers, but importantly **with** the collaboration and support of government.

Talking to all those committed souls at the Fayre it was apparent that whilst there might be real positivity in recognising our common origins, there was now a worrying new challenge facing almost all of our charities and their volunteers. There was a real concern in the room that in the not-too-distant future, given the increasing struggle to recruit people to support them, many charities may simply run out of volunteers and fall away. I, for one, fear that for each charity Alderney loses, the challenges Alderney faces, without an answer to hand, increase. We can see this very poignantly with the loss of charities such as children's groups, including the Scouts, Brownies and Cubs, the Women's Institute and the Militia in just the last decade or so.

For many, volunteering isn't easy or even possible. The Wildlife Trust, like most charities and groups, recognises how hard it is to support those who volunteer and ensure they get the experience and benefits they need and deserve for their commitment and sacrifice. Yet when Alderney is faced with so many challenges, it is perhaps worth reflecting on how well we have worked as a community of volunteers to solve our island's problems in the past, and focus on what we can do as a community together is now more important than ever.


A SOGGY COW MOVING DAY | POPPY EMMENS


ROTARY CLUB AT ST.VIGNALIS GARDEN | ROLAND GAUVAIN


VOLUNTEER AT WILDER BEACH ACTIVITY | THANH DOAN

By
Roland Gauvain
CEO

WILD NEWS

All the latest news from Alderney Wildlife Trust

The Use of Drones to Enhance the Monitoring of Aldemey's Gannets

DRONE IMAGES | SEABIRD WATCH & AWT

With support and guidance from the Seabird Watch Project (Oxford Brookes University), the AWT used drones to monitor Alderney's gannetries on Les Etacs and Ortac. The drone was flown high above the gannet populations in a grid-like pattern, capturing detailed images of their nests. These images were then stitched together to create 2D and 3D maps of the colonies. Using AI technology, the number of gannets can also be counted automatically.

This innovative method is more cost-effective and logistically efficient compared to previous techniques, which relies on a manned aircraft capturing aerial photos and manual bird counting.

Looking ahead, the Seabird Watch Project will collaborate with the States of Guernsey Veterinary Officer to draft guidelines for responsible drone use around wildlife within the Bailiwick.

The Inter-Island Environmental Meeting 2024

This year's IIEM marked the 24th meeting that brings together charities, non-governmental organisations, and government agencies from the Channel Islands, Isle of Man, and nearby regions of France to exchange knowledge and collaborate to advance conservation. This year's theme was Delivering Science and Policy into Action. The presentations and discussions focused on translating science and policy into action, utilising technology in fieldwork, and fostering collaboration between entities.

At the meeting, Matt and Tara, AWT Ecologists, presented on the Alderney State of Nature project. Alex, the Alderney Ramsar Secretariat on behalf of the SoA, presented on Alderney's seabirds, focusing on the methods used by the AWT to monitor puffins and gannets in the Ramsar site.

ALEX'S PRESENTATION | THANH DOAN

Porcupine Marine Natural History Society (MNHS) Field Trip

In September, the Porcupine MNHS, a group of leading British and Irish marine biologists, visited Alderney for their annual field trip, supported by the AWT. Joining the MNHS was the Darwin Tree of Life Project team, who collected samples to sequence the genomes of the 70,000 eukaryotic species found across Britain and Ireland.


DIVING AT BURHOU | IAIN DIXON

Over a week, the marine biologists explored different sites in small groups with AWT marine biologists, engaging in activities such as diving, rockpooling, and specimen collection. The data collected during the field trip contribute significantly to our understanding of Alderney's marine ecosystems and species.

Alderney won the "Gardening for Wildlife" RHS award


BUFF-TAILED BUMBLEBEE IN A GARDEN NEAR ALLEE ES FEES | THANH DOAN

The "Gardening for Wildlife", one of the five new awards from the Royal Horticultural Society to recognise excellence in a particular area, has been conferred on Alderney. The award highlights the island's innovative approach to wildlife-friendly gardening, successfully fostering environments that benefit birds, bees, butterflies and other wildlife. A round of applause for the hard work of the Alderney Horticultural Society, the States Works Departments and the entire community.

Sour Fig Work Party and Talks at Braye (West end)

On 23 November, Guernsey Conservation Volunteers (GCV) joined the AWT team members and volunteers in removing invasive Sour Fig at the west end of Braye Beach. After five hours of work, two big skips, equivalent to 35 m^3, of Sour Fig were removed. This effort helps protect the native dune grasses from the domination of Sour Fig and, hence, stabilise the sand dunes. On the same day, representatives from GCV and AWT delivered talks on Sour Fig removal efforts in Guernsey and Alderney.


SOUR FIG REMOVAL | THANH DOAN

Thank you to everyone who joined us on the day and made it happen!

Top Sightings

Robust Tabby Moth

ROBUST TABBY MOTH | LOU COLLINGS

On 18 October, the first sighting of Robust Tabby Moth *(Pandesma Robusta)*, a member of the family *Erebidae*, was recorded by Lou Collings at the edge of St Anne Town. This marks the first record of the species on Alderney and, we believe, in the entire Channel Islands.

It's intriguing to consider how this moth reached Alderney, as it is not commonly found in the British Isles. There have only been a handful of UK records, most of which are associated with accidental transport on fruit shipments. The moth's natural range extends from Asia through Africa and the Mediterranean, reaching as far north as Spain and Portugal. This particular Robust Tabby Moth could have been carried to Alderney by strong southerly winds.

Leatherback Sea Turtle

On 26 October, a local angler had an amazing encounter with a leatherback sea turtle *(Dermochelys coriacea)*, which surfaced next to their boat just off Alderney's north coast. A leatherback sea turtle is an exceptionally rare sight in our waters. This sighting marks the sixth live leatherback turtle recorded in 2024, according to the UK & Irish Marine Turtles Database.

The leatherback sea turtle likely visited Alderney to feed on the abundant jellyfish in our waters. Of the seven species of marine turtles, six have been recorded in UK and Irish waters: the green, hawksbill, kemp's ridley, leatherback, loggerhead, and olive ridley

LEATHERBACK SEA TURTLE | JTSTEWARTPHOTO

turtles. The leatherback turtle is the only species capable of maintaining a

warm body temperature and surviving in our temperate seas. In early summer, they will return to the tropics and sub-tropics to breed, where they lay hundreds of eggs on sandy beaches.

Thank you to Mark Harding for the awesome sighting.

Tufted Duck

During the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) on Sunday, 17 November, AWT ecologists spotted a beautiful male Tufted Duck *(Aythya fuligula)* at Crabby Quarry. This duck has a blue nasal plate, which was tagged 320 miles away in north-eastern France in late March this year as part of an ongoing programme to study the species' migratory movements.

Some European schemes use nasal saddles to tag waterbirds. These plates are easier to spot than traditional leg rings on birds like ducks, which spend most of their time paddling.

Tufted ducks typically dive underwater for an average of 20 seconds and can reach depths of 3–14 metres in search of food such as molluscs, insects and plants.

TUFTED DUCK | TARA COX

Spoonbills

SPOONBILLS | JAMES BRENTON

On 23 October, 17 European Spoonbills *(Platalea leucorodia)* were spotted over Houmet Herbe by a local wildlife photographer. Prior to this, there have been 4 records of this bird in Alderney, respectively in 1905, 2008, 2015 and 2021.

The spoonbill is a relative of the ibises, a group of long-legged birds with curved bills. Almost as big as a grey heron, the spoonbill is recognised by its long, black, spoon-shaped bill that it uses to catch shrimps, other aquatic invertebrates and small fish.

RED ADMIRAL ON IVY | THANH DOAN

Surviving Winter

In our Summer issue "Warmth", I wrote a little about how plants cope with dry and hot conditions. It is now time to talk about how plants survive during the winter months and also about how we can use them to help other wildlife.

Annual plants have already dropped their seeds, and it will be those (rather than the plant itself which will die off) that make it through the winter, either in the soil or under the snow or leaf litter so they can keep from getting damaged by the cold.

Other plants go into dormancy which helps them conserve energy and resources during the winter, a bit like an animal going into hibernation. This is brought about by an internal change prompting them to reduce or nearly stop growth and is enabled by the energy – water and nutrients - they have stored during the growing season. This is moved from above ground to their roots, bulb or corm underground where the plants can ride out the cold beneath the earth where the temperature is often much warmer. As spring approaches and it gets warmer, the plants can leave dormancy and resume growing again.

Deciduous trees do something similar, pulling water and nutrients to their roots and letting their foliage die off. While leaves are great for catching sunlight during the growing season, they can be a dangerous source of water loss for plants during the winter. By dropping their leaves, trees reduce the surface area exposed to the cold, drying air, helping to conserve water within the plant.

By contrast, evergreen trees retain their leaves (needles): these have very little surface area due to their shape and a thicker outer coating than those of deciduous trees. The leaf size and shape permit much less water loss, and it is one reason why conifers are known for surviving in colder conditions.

If you are thinking about your own garden, some plants don't need any help at all to survive winter. Native plants are really the easiest to have as they have evolved to cope with our wet, cold winters. For instance, trees and shrubs like Silver Birch, Holly or Hawthorn shouldn't need any extra attention and bulbs like native Bluebell are already safely underground, probably starting to put out roots ready for next year. Winter hardy plants - perennials, shrubs or conifers - can simply be left

outside as the roots of these species can withstand frost. However, many potted plants aren't hardy - often these are non-native species that aren't used to low temperatures – but also because the roots are less protected against the cold than a plant growing in the garden.

Consider also how you might help wildlife during the winter. Do you really need to tidy away the last flowers, seed heads, fallen fruit, berries, or dead growth? Wildlife may still be relying on them for food or shelter so leaving some behind could be a lifeline in colder months. Ivy is one of the last garden nectar sources for late-flying insects and birds feast on its fruit through the winter too, so leave any pruning until the last fruit has gone if you can.

Plant winter flowering plants - nectar and pollen are in short supply during winter so by doing this you can help extend the period of availability of these. Winter flowering plants such as Cyclamens, Hellebores, Winter Aconites, Pansies and Snowdrops can flower as early as December if conditions are mild. Winter-flowering shrubs are another valuable asset to a wildlife-friendly garden, providing nectar in the coldest months. This can be a means of survival for overwintering bumblebees and other insects that venture out in search of food on milder winter days and are drawn by strong fragrance from far and wide.

Native winter wildflowers are hardy, resilient plants that grow in unlikely places, such as on roadsides and from cracks in pavements, so resist the temptation to weed these out. Lesser Celandine, for example is high in vitamin C and a saviour for early pollinators and the iconic Daisy can be found all year round offering a small but important nectar source for insects when they need it most!


SILVER BIRCH | LINDSAY PYNE


HAWTHORN | LINDSAY PYNE


LESSER CELANDINE | LINDSAY PYNE

By Lindsay Pyne
Vice-County Recorder for Alderney for the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland

SMALL TORTOISESHELL | AWT STAFF

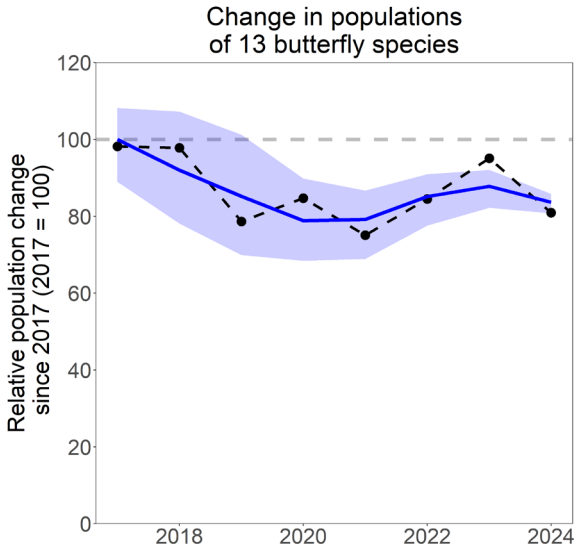
Cause for concern – but not alarm – over Alderney's butterflies

It's been one of those years where news of drastic and concerning declines in wildlife seems to be in every newspaper. Butterflies are one of the groups that have suffered a bad year up and down the UK - Butterfly Conservation even declared a 'Butterfly Emergency' in September. These declines should worry all of us. Butterflies are important parts of natural ecosystems; caterpillars eat vegetation, adults pollinate wildflowers, and both serve as essential food sources for Alderney's birds. What's more, the complex lifecycle of a butterfly, with stationary eggs and pupae, slow moving caterpillars, and yet adults that can fly huge distances, means that changes to butterflies can reflect change affecting a wide range of other invertebrates. As all this happens in only one year, changes to butterfly populations can foreshadow changes to larger and longer-lived animals, and give us a sense check as to how our environment is changing.

Since 2006, the AWT has systematically monitored Alderney's butterfly populations, walking set routes across the island weekly from April to September and recording every butterfly seen. From this, we are able to comprehensively assess not only how butterfly populations have changed in 2024, but also how these changes fit into normal population fluctuations. Butterflies don't exist in isolation, and changes to populations of parasites, predators, and the availability of foodplants for caterpillars can all affect butterfly populations and cause them to rise and fall over time.

Across the set of species we have enough data to model trends for, last year we saw around 14% fewer butterflies year-to-year from 2023. This sounds like – and is – quite a big change to have happened in only a year, but when set in the longer-term picture, it becomes slightly less alarming. Fitting a smoothed trend to the data since 2017 (the blue line on the graph) does show a decline, but also shows that 2023 might have been an unexpectedly good year, and year-to-year comparisons make 2024 look worse than it might otherwise.

This isn't to say that none of the patterns are worrying – there's an overall decline of over 16% since 2017 on the smoothed curve, and species like Common Blue have clearly declined both in one year



- Black dots – butterfly population size for each year (relative to 2017)
- Black dashed line – year-to-year change in population
- Blue line – model predictions of population size for the years 2017-2024, smoothing some variability between years
- Light blue ribbon – margin of error around the model predictions (95% confidence interval)

and over the last several. Some butterflies like Small Tortoiseshell are now so rarely recorded that they aren't even included in this analysis. At the same time, other butterflies are more stable, or even increasing, with Small Heath and Glanville Fritillary among these.

Some of these changes are down to normal population fluctuations, some down to the miserable spring that seems to have affected some species more than others, and some may be genuine long-term changes. It's these long-term changes that we need to understand and respond to if we are to protect Alderney's natural environment. Unpicking these patterns is one of the goals of the Alderney State of Nature project, in which we will report a full analysis of our butterflies among other key habitats and species. In the meantime, if you want to help our butterflies survive, some of the best actions to take are the simplest: just let a section of your gardens grow wild with native pollinator-friendly species and no chemicals. If you want to discuss the changes happening to our wildlife and other things you can do to help, come by the Wildlife Information Centre, or send me an email (ecologist@alderneywildlife.org).

By Matt Lewis
Ecologist


COMMON BLUE | AWT STAFF


PEACOCK | ROWLE BURCHAM

CAMOUFLAGE STRATEGIES

LIME-SPECK PUG | THANH DOAN

Did you recognise the moth at the first sight? Some moths blend in perfectly with the surroundings like this Lime-speck Pug moth. The ability of an animal to make itself difficult to detect by the similarity with the environment is called camouflage. It helps animals conceal themselves from both prey and predators and hence, increases their chance of survival.

Animals have various camouflage strategies, including crypsis, masquerade, motion dazzle and motion camouflage.[1]

Crypsis is the way the animals 'hide' themselves to avoid detection. Crypsis consists of forms of camouflage such as background matching, being transparent, and having a silvery appearance to reflect the light. Background matching is a common means of concealment among animals. The animals possess body colours or patterns that resemble those in the surrounding environment. An example of background matching is the Flower Crab Spider *(Misumena vatia)* which can change its colour from white to yellow to match that of the flower head where it sits waiting to ambush visiting insects. Another example is the Peppered moth *(Biston betularia)*, which has motley wings that blend into tree bark. This moth is also a common example of adaptations in animal colouration for natural selection.

FLOWER CRAB SPIDER | CHLOE HAYWARD

No discussion of camouflage would be complete without mentioning octopuses and cuttlefish, masters of camouflage in the marine world. Common Octopus *(Octopus vulgaris)* can become a 'moving rock' or match a complex background of soft corals, sponges and sand in a short period of time. And then, after only two seconds, it can change from camouflaged to conspicuous! Common Cuttlefish *(Sepia officinalis)* can change not only their colouration but also the texture of their skin surface to replicate that of the surroundings. These molluscs can disguise as clumps of brown algae on a sand plain or blend into the silt-covered rocks. This disguise is called **masquerade**; the animals try to look like something uninteresting as food to the predators such as a leaf, rock, twig, dropping, etc. Even when the predators detect these objects, the prey are relatively safe. Some examples of masquerade are the moths that look like twigs or the tortoise beetle larvae with their fecal shield.

Some animals don't necessarily change their body colouration and texture to blend in. Instead, they borrow natural materials to decorate themselves, like the crabs from the crustacean superfamily Majoidea. One of its representatives in Alderney's waters is the Spiny Spider Crab *(Maja squinado)*, the carapace of which is sometimes washed up on our island's beaches. These majoid crabs have evolved to have spiky, Velcro-like setae on their carapace to hold the decoration in place.

Naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace noticed


COUNTERSHADING IN BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN, DARKER ABOVE AND PALER BELOW | EMILY CUNNINGHAM

many marine animals that occasionally float to the sea surface often have the upper side blue, matching the sea colour when looking from above, and the underside white, matching the wave foam and clouds when viewed from beneath.[1] This colour combination probably helps the animals less likely to be spotted by birds hovering above them and any predators swimming below them. Similarly, many caterpillars have been noticed to have darker upper side, where lights hit the hardest, and lighter underside, where there will be shadows. This gradation in shading makes animals look flat, difficult to separate from the background rather than round, solid and noticeable. This camo strategy was proposed by artist and naturalist Abbott Handerson Thayer as self-shadow concealment or **countershading**.[1]

Many animals use motion camouflage to trick their prey. **Motion camouflage** happens when an animal moves in a certain way so as to trick the receiver's visual system that the animal is not moving at all. One strategy of


MIGRANT HAWKER FLYING | TARA COX

motion camouflage is moving as little as possible. The predator's stealthy slow movement makes the poor prey not realise the approaching threat until it is too late. Another strategy deployed by predators is mimicking the optic flow background from the prey's viewpoint. This strategy has been used by hoverflies and dragonflies.

Another visual camouflage strategy is motion disruption which involves manipulating the contours and form to create a misperception of motion in the perceiver. This strategy was used in World War I: allied ships were painted with dazzle paint (a.k.a razzle dazzle) in striped, curved or zigzagged patterns in colours like black, white, blue in order to confuse submarine gunners. They had difficulty telling the direction and the shape of the ships through their periscope and were likely to miss the target. The expected result was to reduce the toll from gunners' attacks caused to the boats. Although according to the British Admiralty the result of this dazzle camo on the ships was unclear, it did increase the confidence of crew on those ships.[2]

Survival in a world of eat or be eaten is hard. Camouflage isn't the only trick up nature's sleeve! Animals have evolved a range of incredible strategies. Some animals mimic dangerous or distasteful species to deter predators (Mimicry). Others warn potential predators with bright colours or distinctive patterns, signaling their toxicity, unpleasant taste or aggressive nature (Aposematism). Many animals try to attract mates with their colourful plumage (Sexual Ornamentation).

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1. Stevens, M., & Sami Merilaita. (2011). *Animal camouflage : mechanisms and function*. Cambridge University Press.

2. *The Camouflage That Dazzled | JSTOR Daily*. (2018, July 13). JSTOR Daily. https://daily.jstor.org/the-camouflage-that-dazzled/

By Thanh Doan
Outreach & Education Officer

PORCUPINES IN ALDERNEY

The name "Porcupine" is taken from the naval survey vessel HMS Porcupine which was engaged on scientific expeditions in the 1800s.

The Porcupine Marine Natural History Society (PMNHS) is a group of top UK marine biologists. Last September they visited Alderney for a marine research trip. They were accompanied by researchers from the Darwin Tree of Life Project, a project that collects the genetic code of every species found in the British Isles. Hosted by AWT, the field trip saw researchers combing over our beaches, diving at multiple sites around Alderney and recording the species they found.

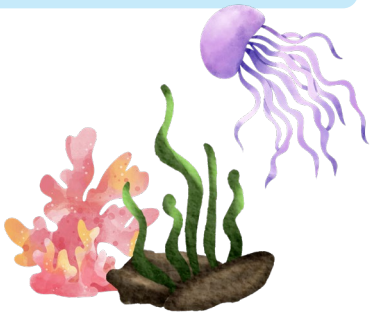
Thanks to the participants' efforts, we have a better glimpse into the world beneath our waves (and along our shores) than ever before. In this article we would like to showcase some of the amazing imagery of the Alderney's marine life captured by the Porcupines.

COMMUNITY OF FILTER FEEDERS INCLUDING SPONGES AND SOFT CORALS | IAIN DIXON

Divers were blown away by the incredible diversity and abundance of sponges such as those in the photo on the left, some of which are likely over 100 years old, and other filter feeding colonial animals such as bryozoans. The combination of the clean, fast-flowing water and the lack of mobile gear (e.g. trawling and dredging) in Alderney's nearshore waters has allowed these beautiful reefs to thrive.

VARIABLE BLENNY | MIKE MARKEY

The variable blenny is a rare sight in the UK. Divers found many amongst Alderney's reefs.




RED SEA FINGERS | IAIN DIXON

ABOVE Red Sea Fingers are a type of soft coral which can grow up to 30 cm high.


SAND EELS | IAIN DIXON

ABOVE Beautiful shoals of sand eels above sand waves on Alderney's south coast. Many fish including sea bass, cuckoo wrasse and giant gobies were recorded.

BELOW Researchers also explored Alderney's rockpools, sandflats, and eelgrass beds finding for rare and unusual marine life, such as this beautiful Crowned Aeolis sea slug.


CROWNED AEOLIS SEA SLUG | NICOLAS JOUAULT

BELOW Many little cushion stars *Asterina phylacata* were found in Longis Bay.


CUSHION STAR | TERESA DARBYSHIRE

RIGHT This unusual and beautiful solitary hydroid was found in Clonque Bay.


HYDROID | JON MOORE

We are grateful to Seasearch, David and Victoria McAllister, Lou, Neil and Marcus Collings, Nigel Clarke, Nigel Shaw, the Alderney Harbour Authority, and the States of Alderney for their invaluable support and guidance. Our thanks also go to the Catholic Hall, which served as a field centre, and most importantly to the members of the Porcupine Natural History Society and the Darwin Tree of Life Project. Once the researchers have processed the data, the records will be freely accessible through national databases and the Alderney Biodiversity Centre.

By Alex Purdie
Marine Biologist

22 Years of Nature Reserv

With little wildlife protection law, and no government policies designed to conserve the natural environment other than the creation of the Designated Area (greenbelt), Alderney historically never had 'nature reserves'. In the late 1960s the States of Alderney disbanded its Natural Beauties Committee, a move which coincided with a decline in management of agricultural land due to the rapid collapse of farming post-war. This in turn meant a reduction in land management throughout the island and with this the falling away of traditional management practices which had, in the past, helped to create the island's wildlife-rich habitats such as heathland, coastal grasslands and meadows.

The Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT) was founded at least in part because of the growing concern of residents and States Members, about this rapid change. Founded in 2002, within its first year the AWT had created Alderney's first ever nature reserve at Longis in collaboration with the States and private landowners. This was rapidly followed by the Vau du Saou Nature Reserve, and then in 2010 the Alderney Community Woodland. In total this saw around 11% of Alderney's land area under agreement which allowed it to be managed for wildlife and public access.

The designation of these sites also provided a focus for environmental study and understanding. In 2003 the AWT started a programme of research into species and habitat surveys which grew rapidly to include university research work. Long term studies of species such as butterflies and bats, whose populations helped demonstrate the health and resilience of the countryside, led to the creation of the AWT's Environmental Evidence Base and the founding of the Alderney Biodiversity Centre (ABC). The ABC is now part of a pan Channel Island Biological Records effort, soon to be launched online. It also saw the creation of the Alderney Bird Observatory in 2015 to help collect more detailed bird data. In 2023 the AWT initiated the Alderney State of Nature (ASoN) project which set out to identify the key species and habitats which can be used to monitor the health of our natural environment in the long term.

Informed through the Environmental Evidence Base Supported by the growing environmental evidence base and with the creation of the nature reserves allowed the AWT to start taking action to conserve the natural environment. This work was aimed at halting the loss of species and habitats which had been experienced over the proceeding years and working towards a restoration of Alderney's rich historic biodiversity. The actions included the re-introduction of grazing of livestock on Longis Common. Cattle and other domestic animal grazing had probably taken place in this area for millennia but had fallen away since horse grazing ceased in the 1980s resulting in the area to start moving towards scrubland, a change which would bring with it a loss of the wildflower-rich coastal

(LEFT) LONGIS COMMON | POPPY EMMENS
(RIGHT) VAU DU SAOU | NIAMH MCDEVITT

grasslands. The conservation programme also introduced reedbed management to help prevent the choking of some of Alderney's few frweshwater ponds at Longis and Mannez.

The mapping of Alderney's habitats identified how poor and sparse Alderney's remaining woodland areas were, containing few native species and only small, isolated areas of mature woodland. This led to the establishment of the Community Woodland project and the planting of over 15,000 native trees in an area of species-poor scrubland on Les Rochers at the heart of the island, creating the largest community woodland project in the Channel Islands.

Over the years the management of the nature reserves has been coordinated through management strategies, created through consultation with island residents and stakeholders. The workload for creating this sort of planning is huge and whilst planning has often not been as detailed or up-to-date as might have been wished, the AWT has always endeavored to make its efforts publicly accessible by publishing them on its website www.alderneywildlife.org

During 2024 the Reserves Team has been conducting public consultations and developing a new Strategy for 2025-30. It is hoped that this will be ready to go to final public consultation early in 2025. Central within this effort is the goal of ensuring that at least 30% of Alderney's environment is thriving for wildlife. Whilst we often think of Alderney as wildlife-rich, the impacts of

GUERNSEY-HEREFORD COWS | ALEX PURDIE

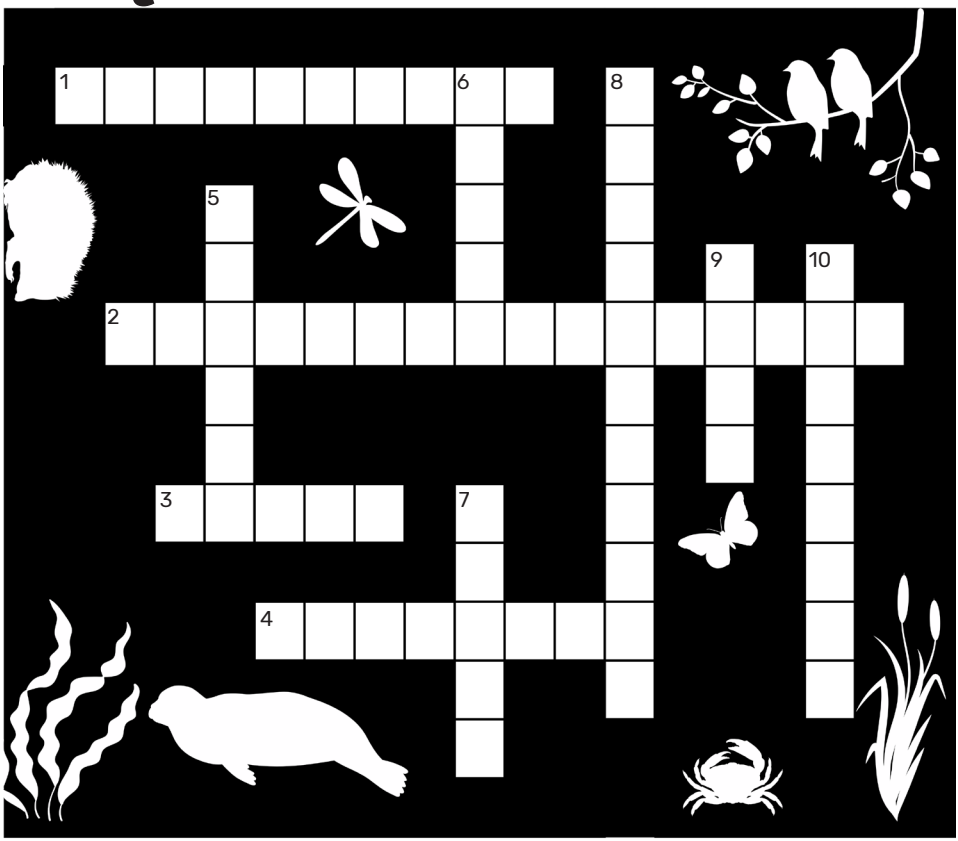
a rapidly changing climate, the arrival of invasive species such as Asian Hornets and new plant diseases such as Ash Dieback, alongside the loss of traditional land management, have had a huge impact on Alderney's countryside. Whilst Alderney may have more green spaces than Guernsey and Jersey, these spaces may well be in poor or declining condition, something the ASoN project is seeking to clarify. If we want to keep Alderney a thriving, wildlife-rich island, able to support future generations of Alderney residents and its wildlife, we need to work on an island-wide scale. This means taking actions such as expanding Alderney's woodland and preserving areas containing species-rich habitats such as coastal grasslands and heathlands.

If you want to find out more, we would love to talk to you. Please contact us at conservation@alderneywildlife.org.

By Roland Gauvain
CEO

WILDLIFE QUIZ TIME

Test your general knowledge on wildlife with our nature crossword!



CLUES ACROSS

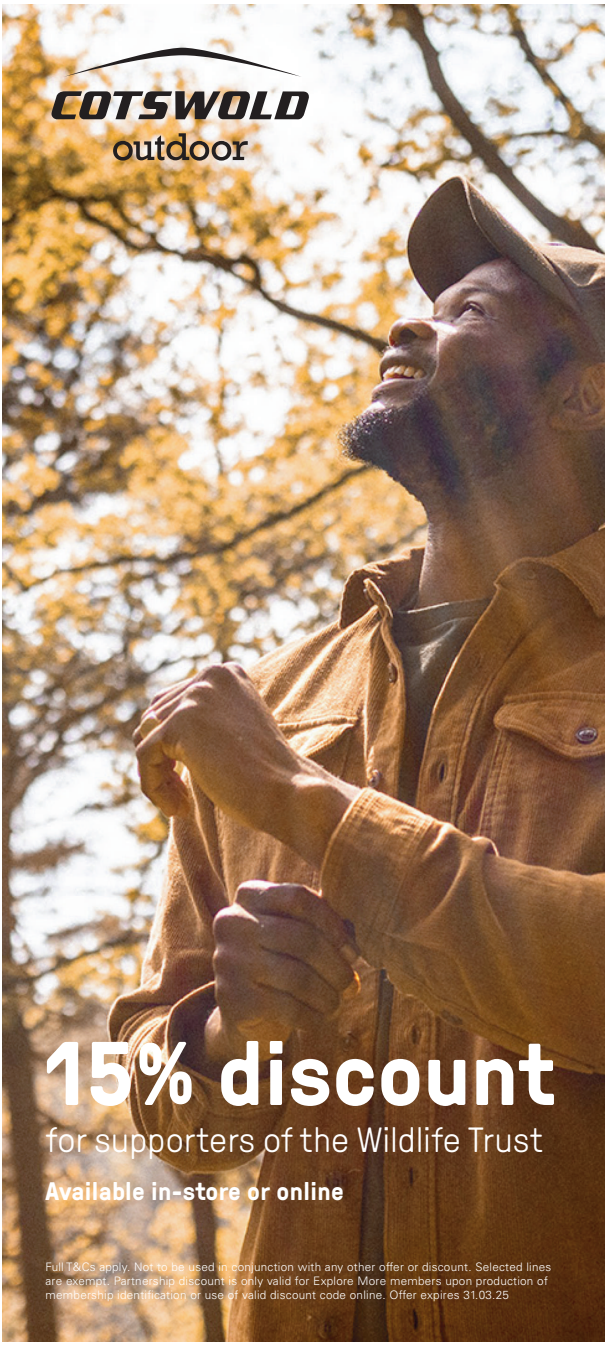
1. The carbon captured by marine and coastal ecosystems (10)
2. The fungus that can be spotted on dead and decaying wood, especially fallen Beech and Ash. These black fungi can be used as portable fire lighting material. (16)
3. The shiny, leathery leaves of this tree are spikier toward the bottom of the tree but rounder as you go further up the tree. (5)
4. A wader that looks similar to a Curlew but smaller and its beak is not as curved, rather straight with a bent end. This bird has 2 brown crown stripes. (8)

CLUES DOWN

5. The fluffy white coat of seal pup (6)
6. It is an ear-shaped mottled greenish brown to red sea snail. The harvesting of this gastropod on Alderney is strictly regulated. (5)
7. In the Victorian era, red-jacketed postal workers were nicknamed after a bird. What bird was it? (5)
8. The most frequently spotted bat species on Alderney (11)
9. An abnormal growth on plants, caused by irritation and/or stimulation of plant cells due to feeding or egg-laying by insects such as aphids, midges, wasps, or mites (4)
10. The only flowering plant that lives on the low shore in Alderney (8)

Answers: ACROSS 1. Blue carbon / 2. King Alfred's Cakes / 3. Holly / 4. Whimbrel / DOWN 5. Lanugo / 6. Ormer / 7. Robin / 8. Pipistrelle / 9. Gall / 10. Eelgrass or Seagrass

COTSWOLD outdoor



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Visit a UK Reserve

Low Hall Nature Reserve


RICHARD NUTTALL

We all have our own ideas of what makes the perfect green space, some places we visit only once or twice on a special occasion and some we see as our own, our own little gem, our 'back garden' of something truly amazing and this is certainly true of Low Hall Nature Reserve in Wigan, Greater Manchester.

The site was developed by Wigan Council under a reclamation scheme in the 1970s, and it now proudly forms part of the Flashes of Wigan and Leigh, being designated a National Nature Reserve in 2022. Low Hall as a name however goes back to the 17th century and the moated manor house owned by the Langton family, Lords of Hindley. At the turn of the 1900 the Lancashire coalfields had been operating on site for almost half a century and Low Hall was a thriving colliery, with its own railway connecting Liverpool and Manchester, providing a goods service to the lucrative Lancashire coalfields. It wasn't until the collapse of coal mining in the 1970s that Low Hall truly came to life in the shadows of mining subsidence,


RICHARD NUTTALL

mineshafts and coal workings.

Even though the reserve is the smallest of the sites covering only 16 hectares, it offers unique habitats due to its mixture of woodland, wetland and meadow areas creating a haven for an abundance of wildlife. The reserve is home to a vast selection of butterflies, damselflies and dragonflies, who certainly make the most of our wildflower meadows in the warmer months. When exploring the reserve, you will be able to spot some of our resident birds; Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail, Treecreeper, Goldcrest, White Throat, Dunnock, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Goldfinch, and Nuthatch to name a few. The reserve is also home to five RSPB red listed birds, including the Willow Tit.


BANDED DEMOISELLE | RICHARD NUTTALL


WILLOW TIT | RICHARD NUTTALL

The Willow Tit is the UK's most threatened resident bird, since the 1970s they have declined by 94%. Willow Tits are sedentary species and will not travel readily, preferring to keep to dense scrub and hedgerows. Their preferred habitat of scrub in post-industrial areas are often seen as habitats of little ecological value and not worthy of conservation efforts, without intervention these habitats mature over time and become unsuitable for the Willow Tit and other small birds. Low Hall provides an ideal habitat due to the abundance of our wetland and woodland areas and the site is actively managed alongside Wigan Council and Lancashire Wildlife Trust to support the Willow Tit habitat.


ROE DEER | RICHARD NUTTALL

Whilst Low Hall is an important link in the Wigan Borough wildlife corridor it perhaps more importantly plays an even bigger role in bringing our communities together. The reserve is nestled in one of the most deprived areas in the Wigan Borough and for a large majority of these communities, Low Hall is on their doorstep. Over the past few years, the 'Friends Group' have worked hard to make Low Hall accessible for all, a welcoming green space, a space to learn, build confidence, make friends, a place to feel valued.

Low Hall should feel like everyone's little gem, 'their own back garden' of something truly amazing.

The Friends of Low Hall National Nature Reserve
Michael, Alan, Catherine, Joanne, Paul & Peter

Thank you

Your support is vital for protecting Alderney's wildlife!
alderneywildlife.org/support-us/donate

FRONT COVER: DUNNOCK | JAMES BRENTON
BACK COVER: GLISTENING INKCAP | CHLOE HAYWARD

Champion, Study, Protect

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