

Issue 1 **February 2018**

Earth Trust News

Exclusive newsletter for Earth Trust Friends

Farming for Food and Wildlife
on the Earth Trust Farm

Also in this issue...

Thrupp Lake

Path to Paradise

Upcoming Friends
Events



Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of Earth Trust News, the new biannual newsletter produced exclusively for Earth Trust Friends.

This first edition is all about transformation: whether it is how we transform the Earth Trust Farm to support wildlife as well as sustainably produce good quality food; how over the last 25 years a field known in medieval times as Paradise Field has been transformed into Paradise Wood, now a national research woodland; or how Earth Trust has had a transformational impact at Thrupp Lake, supporting habitats for important Biodiversity Action Plan species.

We hope you enjoy this new publication for Earth Trust Friends; we're very grateful to have your support to help us in our mission as we connect people with the local environment through a range of activities and opportunities, and in so doing protect much loved greenspaces such as Thrupp Lake and the Wittenham Clumps.

Don't forget to have a look at the list of forthcoming events exclusively for our Friends all listed on the back cover – they're not to be missed!

Until next time,

Jayne



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Over the last 18 months Earth Trust has been proud recipients of...



Best Place to Learn
About the New
Season (Autumn)



Sponsors

This issue of Earth Trust News has been produced thanks to the generous sponsorship of ImageWorks. Every penny of your Friendship subscriptions goes towards protecting much loved greenspaces and connecting people with nature.



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Path to Paradise

25 years ago Earth Trust planted the first trees in an arable field, known in medieval times as Paradise Field. It has since become Paradise Wood, one of the most significant forestry research sites in the country and a living genetic library.

The first research trials were planted by Earth Trust in 1993 and Paradise Wood has since evolved into a unique and important forestry research resource which has enabled scientists to make significant progress in combating disease. Chalara ash dieback first arrived in the UK in 2012 and over the last five years it has swept across the country, including parts of Oxfordshire and Paradise Wood.



Paradise Wood has been invaluable for the Living Ash Project, providing important research resources

Since 2013, Earth Trust has been a lead partner in the Defra funded Living Ash Project, a national project working to secure the future of ash by identifying trees that are tolerant to the disease. Paradise Wood has been invaluable for the Living Ash Project, providing important research resources, including the genetic asset that has enabled scientists to make significant progress combating this devastating disease.

Ash is our third most common species of tree and a staple of the British countryside. There are now 15,000 ash trees in Paradise Wood and it turns out that just one tree growing on this site could hold the key to genetic resistance to ash dieback.

As this project comes to a close this year, we will further update Friends in our summer newsletter on the project's important findings and next steps.



By Lucy Benyon, Communications Officer

Minding the Gaps

As Brexit negotiations continue and with the details of future agri-environment schemes still unclear, farmland birds are likely to be more important than ever before as an indicator of the health of the countryside.

Here we explain how Earth Trust is encouraging farmland bird numbers and how we are beginning to see the benefits from agri-environment payments alongside the financial support of our Friends.

Farmland birds indicate the quality of the farmed environment because they sit near the top of the food chain. Population trends have been well monitored and unfortunately, populations of many farmland birds have declined significantly in recent years with an average 48% decline since 1970 across the 19 farmland bird indicator species.

On the Earth Trust Farm we have focused on the needs of three species, all of which have declined significantly across the country: yellowhammers by 54%, skylarks by 51% and grey partridge by a staggering 87%. Research has shown that there is no single reason for losses of these much loved birds, however, a reduction in mixed farming and changes in land management seem to have had the greatest impact, both leading to reduced food availability and loss of habitat diversity.

Feeding the birds

There has been a trend in arable farming over recent years to sow crops in the autumn straight after the previous crop has been removed.

Whilst this can help with establishing the crop, it deprives farmland birds of a vital source of winter food. On the Earth Trust Farm we have chosen to leave approximately 10 hectares of our fields uncultivated over the winter. In so doing there is spilt grain and broad-leaved weed seeds to feed birds such as corn buntings and yellowhammers helping them survive the winter months.

Over the winter, we also distribute two tonnes of extra food. This is particularly important during 'the Hungry Gap' when food is in short supply. From mid-December to the end of April we spread a special seed mix on the overwintered stubble, made up of wheat and seeds such as oats, white millet and quinoa.

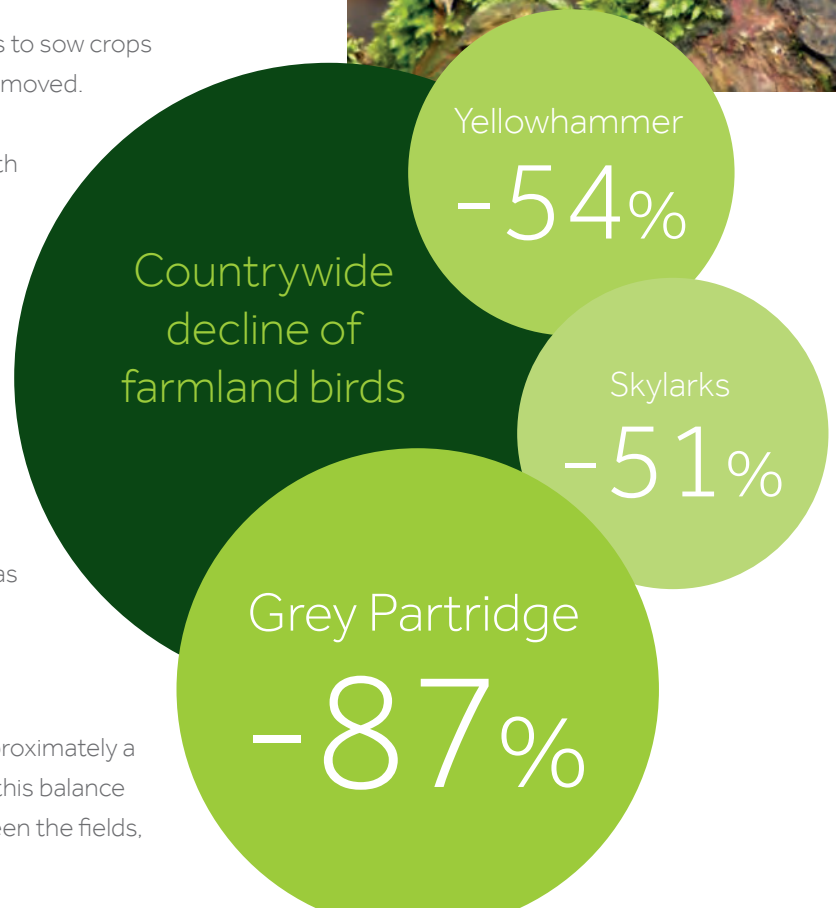
Providing diverse habitat

The Earth Trust Farm is a mixed farm of 500 hectares; approximately a third of which is arable and a third grassland. By achieving this balance of land use, together with many metres of hedge in between the fields,

By Chris Parker, Head of Land Management



Yellowhammer





A walk on the Earth Trust Farm is often accompanied by the beautiful sound of a skylark singing.



(above) Skylark Hedgelaying at the Earth Trust



21 species of Conservation Concern recorded living on the Earth Trust Farm

we provide much needed habitat diversity for wildlife, offering food, shelter and space to breed and raise young.

A walk on the Earth Trust Farm is often accompanied by the beautiful sound of a skylark singing. The males rise almost vertically to a height of about 100 metres in the air where they sing for several minutes, before plummeting back down to the cover of the field. Skylarks, like other birds, require a diversity of habitats to raise their young, nurturing up to two or three broods of young each year to maintain their numbers.

Crops can be tall and dense, preventing skylarks raising more than one early brood but we have found that incorporating 'skylark plots' amongst the arable crop really helps the farm's skylark numbers. We create about 40 skylark plots every year, each measuring approximately 4m x 4m. The skylarks use these plots as their landing strips, enabling them to access the crops, forage and raise healthier young in greater numbers, therefore sustaining a healthy population.

Measure of success

Last year our annual breeding bird survey, carried out by volunteer Dave Eccles, recorded 43 different species, including 21 species identified as being of Conservation Concern!

All this is possible because we have Higher Level Stewardship funding which, as for other farmers, has enabled us to put in place these conservation measures. Additionally, by farming this way we are exploring and demonstrating more sustainable models for farmed food production, whilst still protecting wildlife. As the Brexit conversations continue we need to heed the importance of the living world, so that we can improve the quality of our countryside.

News in Brief

New Website

Exciting developments are underway at Earth Trust with the launch of our brand new website in the spring. As well a fresh new look and ease of use, the new website will include online booking for all our events and an online shop for Green Gifts. Our fantastic new website is being developed by the sponsors of this issue, ImageWorks.



We're delighted to be working with Earth Trust. As a local agency, this is as much a community project as it is a professional one.

Tom Lucas - ImageWorks
www.imageworks.co.uk

Commemorate your loved one in a beautiful greenspace

Planting a tree or dedicating a bench at one of our beautiful sites is a wonderful way to remember a lost loved one. At present, there are a selection of sites available to dedicate a bench or plant a tree, including Castle Hill, Little Wittenham Wood, Thrupp Lake and across the Earth Trust Farm. Each dedication site is specifically chosen for its beautiful views and peaceful atmosphere. To help support Earth Trust's work to care for much loved greenspaces, we ask for a donation starting from £50 for a memorial tree (requested donations reflect the scale of memorial and location chosen). There will be opportunities in the future to plant memorial woodlands. For more information or to make an enquiry, please contact Laura King (laura.king@earthtrust.org.uk).



Good Dog Walkers scheme

Earth Trust's beautiful open spaces are a huge draw to the local community of dog walkers, but sharing that space with grazing animals and the environmental impact of dog mess have introduced some challenges. This summer, Earth Trust established the Good Dog Walkers scheme to champion responsible dog walking and create a community of informed dog walkers who want to help influence attitudes and care for the Earth Trust Farm. The Good Dog Walkers scheme demonstrates how you and your dog can have an enjoyable visit whilst maintaining our stunning site for other users, the wildlife and for farming. If you'd like to find out more or register your interest, please email admin@earthtrust.org.uk

Stay in touch

As you may already know, the law governing Data Protection is changing this year. Part of those changes is to empower people to only hear from their chosen charities.

We would very much like to be one of your chosen charities and continue to be in contact with you, but to do so we need direct marketing consent. You can give your consent online via our website: www.earthtrust.org.uk/GDPR. Thank you to everyone who has already responded.

By Lucy Tomkinson , Community Reserves Warden

Thrupp-date

Thrupp Lake's process of transformation from gravel pit to beautiful wildlife haven has been a gradual one. Here we describe our latest initiatives to improve biodiversity.

Over the last couple of years Earth Trust has focused on supporting habitats for priority species at Thrupp Lake; species that have been identified as most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The lake is well known as a special place for mammals like otters which are an important BAP species, and birds such as terns and sand martins which have Amber status in Birds of Conservation Concern listings.



Over the last year we have added some significant new biodiversity features at Thrupp Lake including an otter holt and two tern rafts. We have also created an artificial 48 chamber sand martin nesting bank (easily spotted with its green roof!). Our hope is to encourage the local population of otters, terns and sand martins to breed and thrive at Thrupp Lake. Bird and bat boxes have also been installed and we have continued to manage the lake's islands to ensure they attract nesting waterfowl such as great crested grebes and roosting overwintering ducks like shoveler and teal.

The importance of biodiversity features on the land around the lake hasn't been forgotten; a small pocket of wildflower meadow, known as St David's Meadow, has been established in an adjoining part of the reserve. Sown with wildflowers and meadow species, the area will add to the habitat diversity that makes this location so special and increase the variety of its wildlife.

Most significantly, all this work has been completed with volunteers! It took an incredible 378 volunteer hours to install all the biodiversity features mentioned and we need to thank the Thursday Group volunteers for their time. We'd also like to thank you, our Friends, for your financial support and TOE2 for funding this work.



Save the date!

Don't forget to book a place on our exclusive Friends only walks and events coming up:

Tuesday 20th March

4pm-5pm | Free

Meet the Shepherd

Emma Blomfield will introduce our Friends to some of the new arrivals in the lambing shed. Find out what it takes to be a shepherd at this very busy time of year!

Wednesday 2nd May

2pm-4pm | £8

Earth Trust Tour

A guided walk and talk for our Friends around part of our wonderful nature reserve in Little Wittenham. Price includes tea/coffee after the walk.

Wednesday 23rd May

1pm-3.30pm | £8 | OX14 3NG

Orchid Walk at Thrupp Lake

A Friends only guided walk to enjoy the spring spectacle of magnificent orchids in some of the conservation areas around Thrupp Lake (OX14 3NG). This is a fantastic opportunity to explore these areas which are not normally accessible to the public.

Places are filled on a first come first served basis so book early, quoting your Friends membership number, to avoid disappointment.



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