Merseyside Biobank's

Winter Newsletter

Prepared by: Elina-Marielle Doss, David Hopkins, Matthew Sharples, Paul Round & Liv Lightfoot

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Welcome to our 6th annual Newsletter

Welcome to our 6th annual newsletter. If you're new, we always provide a summary at the end of the year to celebrate all of our successes over the year.

We constantly work on improving the newsletter so we hope you like the new design. Also, we are always open to feedback and suggestions so if there is anything you would like to see in the newsletter or have any ideas of how to make it more reader-friendly, we would welcome your input as we want to make the content as inclusive as possible.

Now, grab a mince pie, a brew (or mulled wine) and enjoy reading about all the exciting things that happened over the last year.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from all of us at MEAS and MBB!

1. MBB & MEAS Updates

In this section you'll find...

1.1 Elina's Extract

Article by Elina Marielle-Doss

2025 has been a year of growth, discovery, and collaboration for Merseyside BioBank.

From record-breaking citizen science events to vital conservation projects, our community has worked tirelessly to protect and celebrate local biodiversity.

Here's a look back at the highlights of the year.

As winter gave way to spring, snowdrops and crocuses signalled the start of the recording season. City Nature Challenge preparations began early, culminating in April's event which broke our previous years' records with over 12,500 observations and nearly 1,500 species logged. Summer brought vibrant orchids, hoverflies, and moths, while autumn shifted focus to fungi, with waxcap walks and the launch of the Waxcap Grasslands Project. Rare finds included Broad-leaved Helleborine orchids in urban Speke, the first Merseyside record of Metalampra italica, and a Glossy Ibis influx across the UK.

Our data efforts soared this year, with iNaturalist observations peaking at over 6,400 in July. October saw a surge in fungi records, reflecting the richness of our autumn habitats. New initiatives like riverfly kick-sampling and waxcap monitoring as well as our continued and very successful efforts to survey for harvest mice added depth to our biodiversity datasets, ensuring robust evidence for conservation planning.

Community engagement remained at the heart of our work. Twilight Sessions covered topics from reptiles to fungi, while BioBlitzes at Lunt Meadows, Croxteth Park, and Kindling Farm brought hundreds of people together to record wildlife. The Feel Good Festival at Court Hey Park was a summer highlight, blending fun with environmental awareness.

Significant strides were made in conservation: The Ancient Woodland Inventory expanded from 15 sites to 338, covering 1,364 hectares. Local Wildlife Sites assessments revealed ongoing challenges with invasive species, while £1 million in Nature Recovery funding was secured by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to focus on capacity building in the LCR. Sand dune restoration at Formby continues, and Ainsdale Sand Dunes was designated an Important Invertebrate Area, home to critically endangered species like Ammoecius brevis. The Natural Flood Management Project led by Mersey Rivers Trust continued successfully in its second year and we ran a few more BioBlitzes and Recording Days to engage with local communities about the project and collect some new data.

We celebrated the contributions of interns and volunteers, bid farewell to Gabriel Dixon, and welcomed previous volunteer David Hopkins as our new Biodiversity Data & GIS Officer. Partnerships with ALERC, Tanyptera Trust, and Liverpool Botanical Society, the newly formed North West Mammal Recorder Network and North Merseyside Mammal Group strengthened our collective impact.

Despite successes, challenges persisted. The warmest spring and summer on record brought drought conditions, impacting dune habitats and Natterjack toad breeding. Invasive species management, improved data flow and Local Nature Recovery Implementation remain a priority as we look ahead to 2026.

1.2 LSP, NBN & GBIF

Article by David Hopkins & Matthew Sharples

Local Sites Partnership

Field work on updating LWS citations has been continuing this year. Jo Doolin has been leading on organising site surveys across Liverpool for an update of the local plan with the other regions being covered by our standard monitoring with support from our Assistant Ecologists Mat and Paul. There might be a lot of work coming towards us next year, which we will be sharing in our monthly bulletins.

More details can be found later on in the newsletter.

National Biodiversity Network (NBN)

Currently there are about 980,000 records from MBB held in the NBN database. In 2025, there were over 5.6 million records downloaded from over 6 thousand download events. Our records shared with the NBN are being used in various ways, including 37% of downloaded records used for educational purposes, about 20% of record downloads used by government organisations, just under 20% of records used for different types of research, and about 9% of downloads used by conservation. biosecurity and personal uses.

To see for yourself, click here

Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF)

According to GBIF, since 2000, records and data supplied by the Merseyside Biobank have been cited in journals 1,288 times, including 173 citations in 2025 alone. This highlights the vital role that data collected by Local Environmental Record Centres (LERCs) like ours play in supporting a wide range of research. This year's citations include articles not only on core topics such as ecology, biodiversity, and conservation, but also on challenges related to agriculture, invasive species, and climate change, as well as the critical links between nature and human health.

If you'd like to explore the full range of topics, click here

1.3 MEAS & MBB Updates

Article by Matthew Sharples and David Hopkins

New Starters

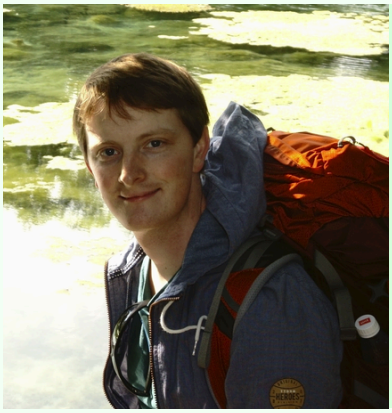
2025 saw the team at MEAS getting back up to full capacity after saying goodbye and good luck to Dan and Leo, who both moved into the private consultancy world. We welcomed Tasha and Claudia who have been great additions and brought with them a wealth of experience from the private consultancy world and Natural England, respectively. We also said goodbye to Gabe at MBB and welcomed David to the team.

Tasha Hesketh

Tasha's background at Tyrer Ecological Consultants involved protected species surveys, habitat assessments, and environmental reporting. She has been our go to bat expert as a Natural England Bat Level 2 Class Survey Licence holder, which is good as we remember her introductory article stating that … " I particularly enjoy conducting bat surveys".

Claudia Sephton

Claudia's background at Natural England as a Wildlife Licensing Officer involved working on protected species and legislation covering a range of different projects, from small householder applications to large Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. This involved working with badger and aquatic mammals, such as Water Voles, Otters, Beavers and Great Crested Newts, the species she first trained on.



David Hopkins

David's background includes a PhD and postdoctoral research in ecology and evolution, following an early passion for nature recording. After years in academia, he reconnected with the natural world through volunteering with local groups, which inspired his move into conservation. Now as Biobank's Biodiversity Data and GIS Officer, David focuses on managing biodiversity data, supporting projects, and working with the community and volunteers who make it all possible.

1.3 MEAS & MBB Updates

Article by Matthew Sharples and David Hopkins

Internships

We had another great intake of interns this year. We would like to say a big thank you to Rachel and Georgia from Liverpool John Moores University, and Xixi and Liam from Chester University, who were able to contribute to our ongoing Brown Hare and Reptile Monitoring programmes as well as many other MEAS and Local Environmental Records Centre tasks. They were involved in wildlife recording tasks, including the City Nature Challenge and core Merseyside BioBank tasks. such as Habitat Mapping and Data Harvesting. We also provided some mutually beneficial QGIS training and tailoring the programmes to benefit their particular interests as well as our needs.

Georgia Mclean

BSc Zoology

Student at LJMU

Yuqi Xiqi (Qiqi) Sutte

BSc Geography

Student at Chester University

Rachel Carroll

BSc Geography

Student at LJMU

Liam Friel

BSc Geography

Student at Chester University

We're looking forward to continuing our internships in the new year with placements from Chester University, Edge Hill and Liverpool John Moores already being organised. If you are a student at a local university, or know someone who is, it is a great thing to look out for, get involved in and a great opportunity to gain insight into future career paths.

For more information, see links below:

Liverpool John Moores University Students

Edge Hill University Students

Chester University Students

1.4 Year in Review: 2025

Article by Matthew Sharples, Paul Round and David Hopkins

January

We launched new content for our monthly e-bulletins, including BioBank Bounty and iNaturalist species

February

Georgia and Rachael joined us from LJMU on an internship at BioBank, working on the Brown Hare project

March

The Liverpool City Region opened up a live public consultation for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy

April

The MBB team covered various events over North Merseyside for the global City Nature Challenge 2025

May

We welcomed our new Ecologists at MEAS, Claudia and Tasha

June

We hosted a Bioblitz at Croxteth Park and Lunt Meadows Nature Reserve.

July

We joined Mersey Rivers Trust with a Bioblitz at Millenium Green to assist with their NFM Project

August

We said farewell to our Biodiversity, Data and GIS Officer, Gabriel Dixon. Thanks for all your work, Gabe!

September

We welcomed David Hopkins to the BioBank team as our new Data and GIS Officer

October

We kicked off this month with both Waxcap Grassland and Harvest Mouse surveys across the LCR

November

A month busy with insightful conferences like NBN (Bristol), “Communicate” (online), BSBI (in Ormskirk!)

December

Again, a huge thank you for all your support for 2025

1.5 How to get involved

Who we are

Merseyside BioBank is the Local Environmental Records Centre for North Merseyside. We collect, manage and share vital information about the wildlife and habitats in our area.

By bringing together records from volunteers, community groups, researchers and professionals, we provide a trusted evidence base that supports conservation, planning and environmental decision-making.

We also help strengthen local recording through training, volunteer opportunities and projects that encourage people to get involved in understanding and protecting North Merseyside's natural environment.

Interested in volunteering with us?

See the next page on our volunteering process & how you can get involved with us

Want to keep in touch?

Follow us on social media, and sign up to receive our monthly bulletin

Merseyside BioBank

mbblerc

Merseyside BioBank

Merseyside BioBank LERC

mbblerc.bsky.social

Sign up to our monthly bulletin here

Want us to advertise for you?

We would like to support any local wildlife, conservation, recording, species-specific groups or Friends of Groups.

We hope to continue to develop our local biodiversity network by:

- Advertising your up-coming events
- Help recruit new members and volunteers
- Provide support on wildlife ID and recording
- Opportunities to work together on projects, and
- Provide connections between local biodiversity groups

Please get in touch: **info@merseysidebiobank.org.uk**

1.6 Volunteering at MBB

Express interest

Get in touch by:

- Following links in our social media & monthly bulletin
- Applying via our online platform
- Contacting us directly at info@merseysidebiobank.org.uk

Attend an induction session

Held monthly, allows you to:

- Meet MBB staff
- Learn about what we do and why it is important
- Discuss your opportunities

Sign up to our volunteer portal

The portal allows you to:

- Book volunteer shifts
- Log hours worked on projects

Start volunteering

Office

- Collate records
- Digitise maps
- Write articles

Field

- Outreach events
- Surveying
- Collect data

Personal Projects: Have your own personal interests supported

To see our volunteer opportunities, or to register for the volunteer platform, please scan the QR code or click here

2. MBB Surveys and Events

In this section you'll find...

Click to jump to articles

2.1 Harvest Mouse Nest Surveys
in North Merseyside 2025

Article by Elina Marielle-Doss

We are in our third year of harvest mouse nest surveys. Current data on their abundance and distribution are very limited and outdated. The species is classified as Near Threatened in Britain, facing habitat loss and declining survey coverage, especially in traditional territories.

Analysis of the 2021–2022 and 2023–2024 National Harvest Mouse Surveys showed that only 25 percent of historic survey squares (hectads) were revisited, leaving vast geographic gaps.

Monitoring from earlier decades suggested a decline in occupancy between the 1970s and 2016, and although millions of mice were estimated in 1995, more recent figures (~566,000) are unreliable due to sparse data. Consequently, the Mammal Society has relaunched a 2025–2026 National Harvest Mouse Survey, including retracing previous sites, to build a robust, repeated-measures monitoring framework as recommended under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and updated NERC guidance. Continuous, extensive resurveying is essential to assess trends, inform habitat management, and support conservation actions.

Our surveys have already added so much valuable information about the distribution of harvest mice in North Merseyside. This year, with some advice from local mammal expert, Tony Parker, we have resurveyed/are resurveying some sites we have surveyed in the past, i.e. Speke Hall, including the Coastal Reserve outside by the old runway, and Lunt Meadows.

Unfortunately, due to a very delayed mowing of fields, we only found harvest mice in one of the fields at Speke Hall, showing that correct management and early mowing is vital for sensitive species, such as the harvest mouse. In happier news, we did find some more nests at Lunt Meadows so their site management seems to be spot on, at least for harvest mice. Below is a breakdown of sites and nests we found since we started surveying in 2023.

Season	Location	Nests
2023/24	Speke Hall	3
2023/24	Speke Coastal Reserve	3
2024/25	Sutton Manor	6
2024/25	Knowsley Safari Park	0
2024/25	Lunt Meadows	6
2024/25	Speke Hall	16
2024/25	Halewood Park Triangle	0
2025/26	Speke Hall	3
2025/26	Lunt Meadows	2
2025/26	Kindling Farm	3
2025/26	Speke Coastal Reserve	Survey Jan 2026

2.2 City Nature Challenge 2025

Article by David Hopkins

Between Friday 25th April and Monday 28th April Merseyside BioBank hosted the City Nature Challenge in the Liverpool City Region for its 7th year, a global event encouraging people to record nature. This year was particularly special as it marked the 10th anniversary of the CNC worldwide.

Liverpool City Region smashed its previous record, with 13,930 observations made in just 4 days, almost doubling the 7,441 records from 2024. These observations represented 1,495 species, many of which were verified as usable data.

What was really great to see was not just the increase in records, but also the massive rise in participation. One of the core goals of CNC is to raise the profile of species recording and highlight the value of knowing the species around us. Seeing hundreds more people get involved this year is a fantastic achievement.

The MBB team had a busy CNC weekend:

Friday: We visited Childwall Woods with the Friends of Childwall Woods and recorded 232 species across 607 observations.

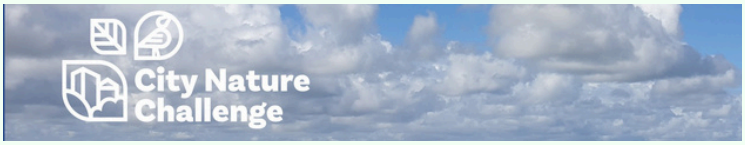
Saturday: We organised two BioBlitz events. The first was at Acornfield Plantation, joined by staff from Knowsley Council, volunteers, and local expert Chris Felton, adding 91 species to our list. We also ran a BioBlitz at Mesnes Park in Newton-le-Willows, recording another 50 species.

Sunday: Paul and Elina headed to Sefton Park, joined by volunteers and the Friends of Sefton Park group, enthusiastically recording 187 species across 410 observations. Meanwhile, at Duke Street Park, Formby, Gabriel and volunteers, while dodging footballs, picked up another 105 species.

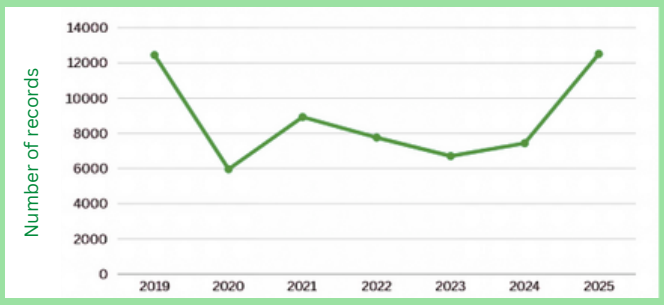
City Nature Challenge 2026

Hosting or joining a CNC event, or recording individually, is a fantastic experience. The next CNC runs again from April 24th to 27th 2026.

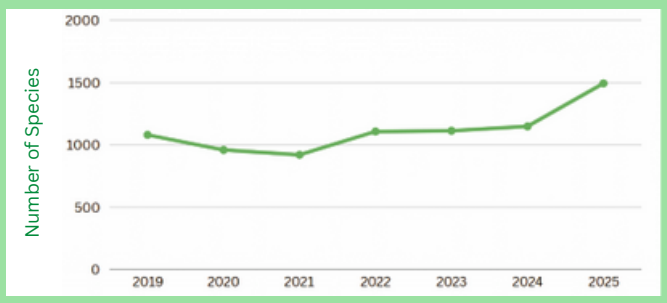
Click here for more information on CNC
Sign up for the 2026 Challenge here
Watch the LCR CNC information Video



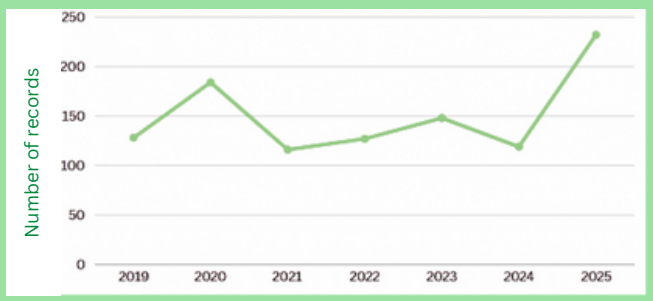
Number of observations collected in each year



Number of different species recorded in each year



Number of recorders in each year



Monday: On the last day, at Speke and Garston Coastal Reserve, volunteers, and local expert Tony Parker, spotted a total of 111 species. Gabriel was at the Queen's Jubilee Nature Trail in Southport, where 183 species were recorded. Elina, together with MBB's new staff member David, took two student interns for kick sampling and then did some pond dipping at MBB's home site in Court Hey Park to add a variety of species to the project.

2.3 Twilight Sessions

Article by Liv Lightfoot

A huge thank you to everyone who participated in our sessions in 2025, your support for these sessions is appreciated.

2025 Programme:

JAN 16 — Thursday, 18:30-20:30
Introduction to Botany

FEB 4 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30
Breeding & Farmland Birds

MAR 4 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30
Mammal Projects

APR 1 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30
CNC & Wildlife Recording

MAY 6 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30
Reptiles & Surveying

JUN 3 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30
Moths & Butterflies

JUL 1 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30
Grasshoppers

AUG 5 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30
Tree ID & Plant Galls

SEPT 2 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30
Bat Walk

OCT 7 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30
Fungi

OCT 28 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30
Tracks, Signs, Skulls & Bones

Missed out on one of our sessions?

Don't worry! Our sessions that include a talk are recorded and uploaded to our YouTube Channel.

This means you can also catch up on our sessions from 2024 too.

2.3 Twilight Sessions

Article by Liv Lightfoot

Our Twilight Sessions are back for 2026!

We are again looking forward to providing new sessions in 2026, with more talks lead by our team and outside experts. We will continue to cater to nature enthusiasts, whether you are a beginner or seasoned recorder, please join us to learn something new.

Why attend?

- Connect with Nature
- Gain new skills and knowledge
- Contribute to conservation
- Join a community of like-minded people

How can you join?

Spaces for these workshops are limited, so be sure to register early to secure your spot! All sessions are expected to run between 18:30-20:30 on the first Tuesday evening of the month. There is no twilight session in January.

2026 Programme*:

- FEB 3 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30 — **Owl Pellets**
- MAR 3 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30 — **Bees**
- APR 7 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30 — **Seabirds or Waders**
- MAY 5 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30 — **Common caterpillars and foodplants**
- JUN 2 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30 — **Longhorn beetles**
- JUL 7 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30 — **Ferns**
- AUG 4 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30 — **Hoverflies**
- SEP 1 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30 — **Spiders**
- OCT 6 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30 — **Fungi/Waxcap Grasslands Project**
- NOV 3 — Tuesday, 18:30-20:30 — **Winter species**

*times and dates subject to change. Keep an eye on our social media for up to date information. Tickets are available on Eventbrite, and will be advertised through our monthly bulletin and on social media.

Sign up to our monthly bulletin here

2.4 ALERC Conference 2025

Article by David Hopkins

This year's conference theme was 'New, Improved and Different', which perfectly captured the innovative work happening across the country

Once a year, the community of Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) meets at the ALERC Conference to catch up and discuss practices, policies, and the day-to-day challenges of running a LERC. ALERC (Association of Local Environmental Records Centres) is an umbrella organisation that brings us together, not only to support each other's work but also to create a unified voice to advocate for our sector at a national level.

This was my first ALERC Conference, and it was a great opportunity to be introduced to a diverse yet welcoming community representing most of the 60+ LERCs across the UK.

This year's conference theme was *"New, Improved and Different"*, which perfectly captured the innovative work happening across the country. Like many conservation organisations, LERCs face numerous challenges, from adapting to new technologies and navigating complex policies to securing sustainable funding to continue our vital work into the future.

Topics discussed this year reflected these challenges, including:

- Streamlining data pipelines using tools and programming languages like SQL, Python, and R
- Exploring how we can reliably and sustainably use fast-evolving AI technologies alongside high-throughput recording methods
- Developing new ways to engage with organisations and the public in our work

One recurring theme across talks and workshops was how much the sector struggles to effectively advocate for the importance of LERCs, which, often operating with very limited resources, deliver many crucial conservation services. What was truly inspiring was the passion and innovation across the room to meet these demands.

This is an ambition we share at Merseyside BioBank, and we hope you'll join us in spreading the message of why species and habitat records are essential for their continued protection.

2.5 Tanyptera Trust Recording Days 2025

Article by Elina Marielle-Doss

This year, we once again supported the Tanyptera Trust, also known as the North West Invertebrate Group, with Recording Days in North Merseyside and attended a few of their workshops. If you have an interest in invertebrates, then we cannot recommend their events enough as they cover a range of invertebrate groups and offer a range of levels, from beginner courses to expert ones. Moreover, you can join hands-on workshops and recording days, as well as online and offline seminars, where you can learn from expert recorders.

Below we've outlined the events we attended and have listed some of the highlights from this year.

Introduction to Bees Workshop Ness Gardens 17th May 2025

A mixture of IDing bumblebees and mining bees in the classroom and in the field. Highlight of the day was catching a Large Scissor-Bee Chelostoma florisonne (right), the closest records are supposedly in Suffolk. It was the first record for the site and there are only a few other records in Cheshire so a very exciting find.

You can have a look at other events and highlights on the Tanyptera Trust website

2.5 Tanyptera Trust Recording Days 2025

Article by Elina Marielle-Doss

Invertebrate Recording Day Hightown 23rd May 2025

In total, 237 records were collected of 174 species by 8 recorders.

Two highlights of the day were the rare Tawny Cockroach Ectobius lapponicus, recorded by P. Smith (right), and a fly, never before recorded in Britain, i.e. Phorbia penicillaris (Anthomyiidae), recorded by P. Brighton.

This species has a wide distribution across Europe, from Germany and Scandinavia to France and Hungary, and even as far afield as North America. It is often found in dunes and sandy habitats, making Hightown Dunes – 60 hectares of grassland, scrub, reed-bed, and saltmarsh – a typical setting.

Invertebrate Recording Day Kindling Farm 30th August 2025

In total, 207 records of 115 species were gathered by 12 recorders.

We have been working with Kindling Farm over the past two years, helping them to record wildlife on their organic farm. As part of our partnership work, we organised an Invertebrate Recording Day with the Tanyptera Trust at the farm this year. Highlights from the day included a few firsts for VC59, i.e. a fly Rhaphium appendiculatum (Dolichopodidae), recorded by P. Brighton – a small predatory long-legged fly associated with humid grassland and wetland margins – and a true bug Stictopleurus abutilon (Rhopalidae), recorded by P. Brighton – a plant bug associated with dry grassland habitats, which is historically rare in Britain and now spreading northwards. Also, the beetle Edaphus lederi (Staphylinidae) was found, recorded by C. Washington, which was only added to the UK list recently (2025) and all other records have been in the south of the country, so it's the first record for the North West.

3. North Merseyside Recording

In this section you'll find...

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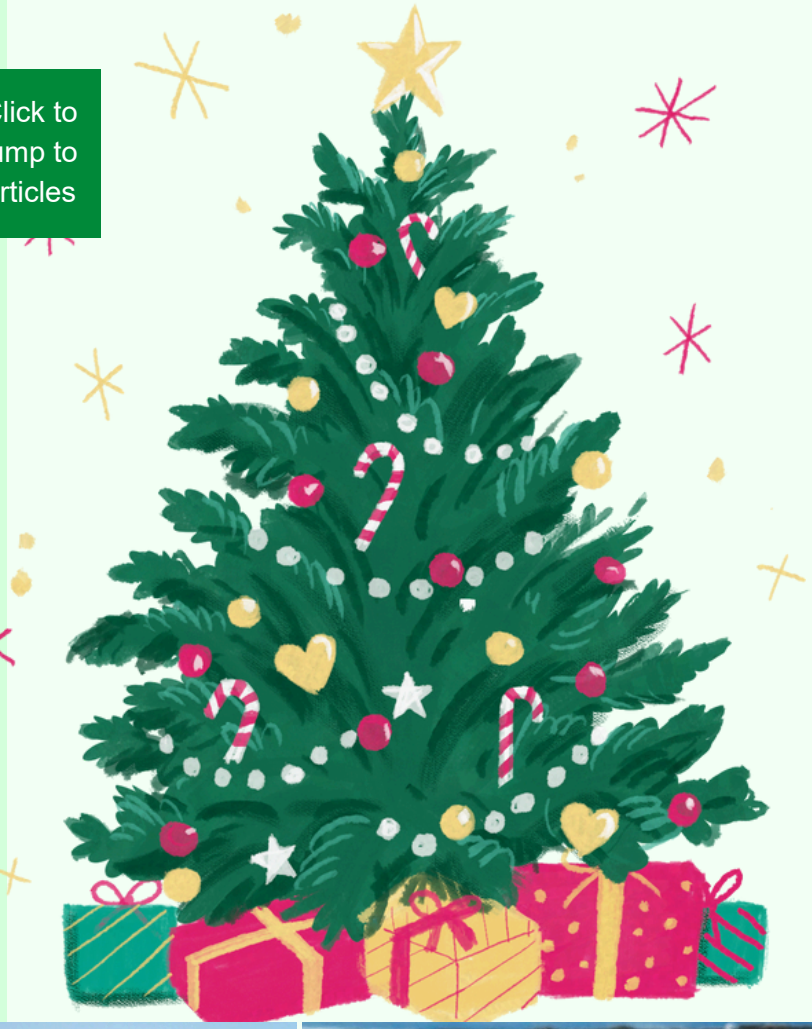


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3.1 A year of iNaturalist

Article by David Hopkins

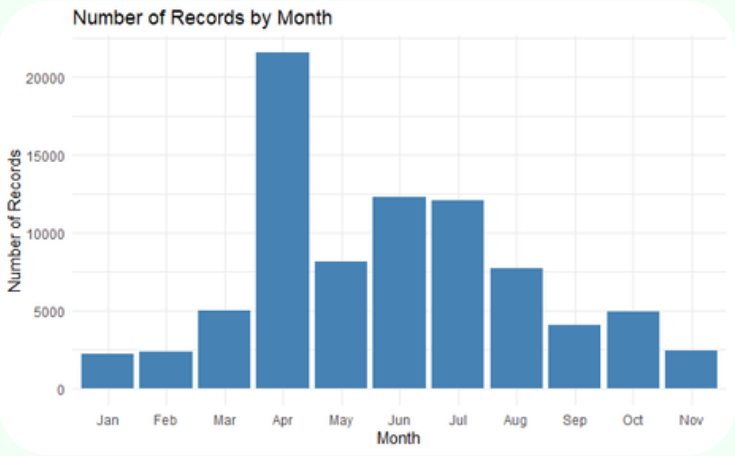
This year, iNaturalist recordings for the Merseyside Biobank Project **surpassed 52,000 records**, up 15% from last year. It's fantastic to see the recording community grow over the last decade through tools like iNaturalist and iRecord that empower citizen scientists. Together, we have added hundreds of thousands of records. Each entry represents an organism preserved in databases that support research and conservation.

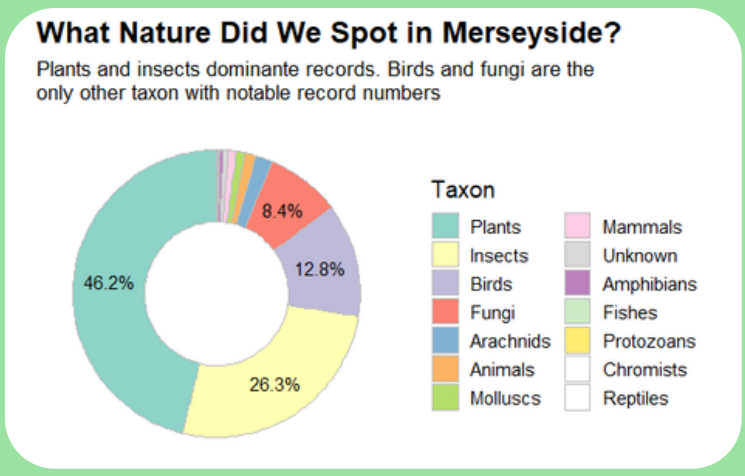
Results breakdown

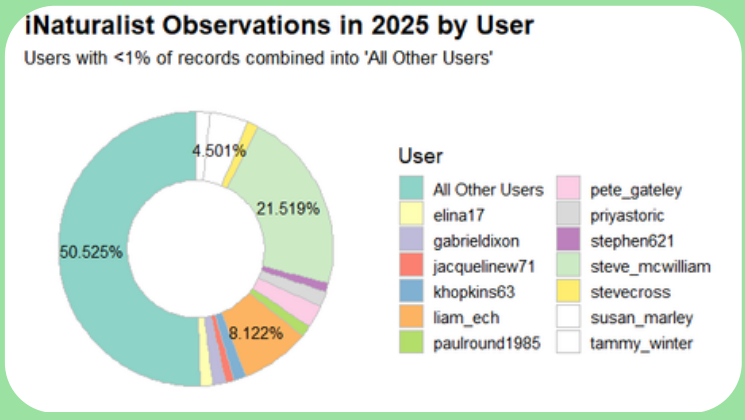
Across the year, we saw the expected seasonal rise and fall in records, but April stood out thanks to the massive efforts of the City Nature Challenge, which added **nearly 14,000 records** during what we would expect to be a quiet month, underscoring the event's enormous reach. Most users record **plants or insects**, and occasionally birds or fungi.

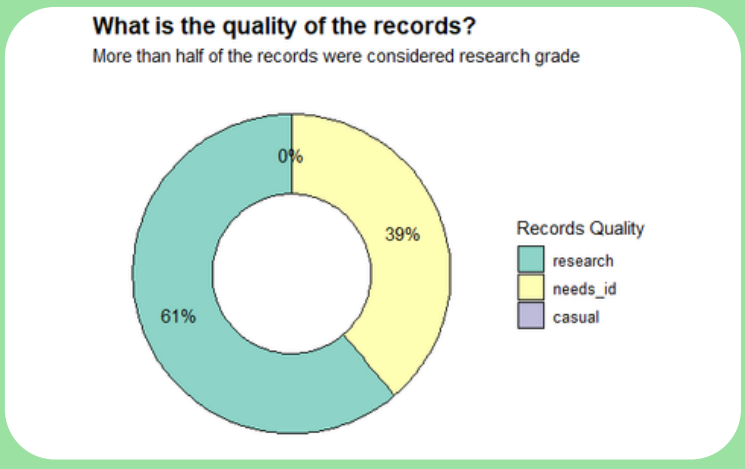
About half of all records come from users who made **only a few observations**, but some dedicated individual contributors added from a few hundred to over a thousand records.

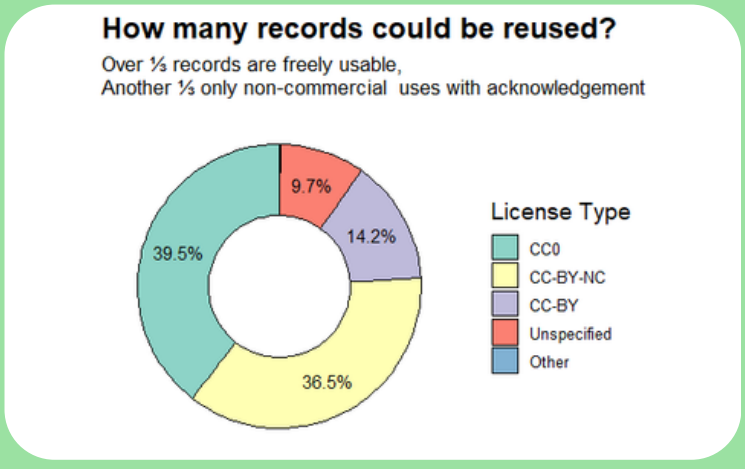
Nearly **two-thirds of all records have reached research grade**, and over two-thirds are either openly licensed (CC0) or require attribution and non-commercial (CC-BY-NC), allowing **researchers and conservationists to use a large portion of the data collected.**











3.1 iNaturalist 2025 Top Recorded Species

Article by David Hopkins and Elina-Marielle Doss

1 PLANTS

Stinging Nettle
Urtica doica

431 Records

2	**Common Hawthorn** *Cataegus monogyna*	392
3	**Sycamore Maple** *Acer pseudoplatanus*	376
4	**Wood Avens** *Geum urbanum*	360
5	**Cow Parsley** *Anthriscus sylvestris*	347

1 BIRDS

Carrion Crow
Corvus corone

454 Records

2	**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*	408
3	**Common Wood Pigeon** *Columa palumbus*	358
4	**European Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*	314
5	**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis*	291

1 INSECTS

Harlequin Ladybird
Harmonia axyridis

603 Records

2	**Common Hawthorn** *Cataegus monogyna*	397
3	**Alder Leaf Beetle** *Agelastica alni*	343
4	**Large Yellow Underwing** *Nocuta pronuba*	305
5	**Seven-spot Ladybird** *Coccinella septempunctata*	293

1 OTHER ANIMALS (NON BIRDS)

Eastern Grey Squirrel
Sciurus carolinensis

146 Records

2	**Common Frog** *Rana temporaria*	131
3	**Common Toad** *Bufo bufo*	92
4	**European Mole** *Talpa europaea*	91
5	**European Hedgehog** *Erinaceus europaeus*	69

1 FUNGI & LICHENS

Common Orange Lichen
Xanthoria parietina

191 Records

2	**Fungi General** *Fungi*	167
3	**Agaricomycetes** *Agaricomycetes*	151
4	**Sycamore Tar Spot** *Rhytisma acerinum*	113
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1 OTHER SPECIES

Wolf's Milk
Lycogala

17 Records

2	**Dog Vomit Slime Mold** *Fuligo septica*	16
3	**False Puffball** *Reticularia lycoperdon*	14
4	**Bladderwrack** *Fucus vesiculosus*	10
5	**Slime Mold** *Didymium spongiosum*	10

3.2 Biological Recording Highlights 2025

Article by David Hopkins, Matthew Sharples and Paul Round

january

A Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* was present at Cabin Hill NNR. This species is usually found in northern Scotland and throughout Ireland, so a very unusual sight in North West England!

february

Phil Smith spotted a Yellow-bowed Smoothwing *Scaeva selenitica* Wicks Path, a distinctive and relaitly large hoverfly, who's larvae feed on pine aphids that would occur down the Sefton coast line.

march

Four Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* were seen flying over RSPB Marshside/Crossens, Southport. This species now breeds in sites across Suffolk, Norfolk and Yorkshire.

april

On a site visit, the nationally rare Spring Sedge *Carex caryophyllea* was spotted by our local botanical expert Josh Styles in National Trust's Speke Hall's front lawn. Here patch of rare health land that's lain dormant for decades has begun to regenerate.

3.2 Biological Recording Highlights 2025

Article by David Hopkins, Matthew Sharples and Paul Round

may

A green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio* was recorded in Altcar Rifle Range. This pretty orchid with its distinctive green veins on its flower hood is a 'Near Threatened' orchid and a great indicator of unimproved grasslands, a priority habitats in the Liverpool area.

june

Kent Fruit Piercer Moth *Aspila lobarzewskii* is the first record for Merseyside and only second in the UK. As the name suggest this moth's larvea bores and feeds in apples and plums cratinga reconisable hole with leaf miner like marks.

july

The exceptionally beautiful Verrall's Spearhorn *Chrysotoxum verrall* was spotted again by Phil Smith. The larvae of this species are thought to have a unique association with aphid-attending ants such as Lasius niger.

august

Josh Styles spotted the Sea-holly Broomrap *Orobanche minor var. Pseudoamethystea*. Broomrapes are brown to purple coloured plants that lack photosynthetic ability but instead parasitise the roots of other plants. The Sea-Holly variant is a very rare specialist of its namesake host.

3.2 Biological Recording Highlights 2025

Article by David Hopkins, Matthew Sharples and Paul Round

september

The Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* made national news earlier this year due to the large number and widespread sightings, as it is normally considered a southern European species. However, like many southern species, it has been rapidly expanding north, visiting WWT Martin Mere.

october

A L-album Wainscot Moth *Mythimna l-album* was trapped to light at Formby Point, which was new record to North-west England. This species is associated with coasts but is found more on the southern coastline of the UK.

november

A Pink Waxcap *Porpolomopsis calyptriformis* was observed at Millfields, St Helens. Evidence of these and other waxcaps is especially important, as they are often vulnerable or rare species and key indicators of species-rich, unimproved grasslands.

december

A Poplar Leafhopper T*remulicerus tremulae*, was spotted on the 9th. This is a first record for this species in North Merseyside. A great find to end the year on.

3.3 Dr. Phil Smith's 2025 Wildlife Notes Summary

Article by Dr Philip Smith

My recording area is mainly the Sefton Coast, including England's largest sand-dune system and the extensive saltmarshes and grazing marshes at the mouth of the Ribble Estuary. Almost all of this area benefits from a raft of statutory protections and has several outstanding nature reserves. I have also been known to venture inland occasionally to the West Lancashire mosslands and other sites within a short drive of my home in Formby. I started off as a keen birdwatcher but, in recent decades, have concentrated more on insects and plants which make attractive subjects for close-up photography. All significant observations are sent to the relevant regional and national recorders and I write up longer-term studies for publication, illustrated with my own photographs. My monthly 'Wildlife Notes' have appeared on the Formby Civic Society website since March 2007. Each starts with a summary of the month's weather conditions, which are often crucial to what can be seen and where. I also like to describe examples of management operations that are essential for maintaining the amazing diversity of wildlife that we have been fortunate to inherit. How about 3500 insects and over 1200 higher plants on the Sefton sand-dunes just for starters?

January

As usual, January 2025 was a fairly quiet month for wildlife, though not for weather, a named storm on 24th being the UK's most powerful in a decade. Fortunately, its worst effects were to the north of us. Black-headed Gulls at Southport Marine Lake were worth checking for large colour-rings that could be read from a photo. Those I recorded had already been seen several times at Southport and once in Nottingham. However, a wintering Mediterranean Gull sported what appeared to be a Polish ring.

3.3 Dr. Phil Smith's 2025 Wildlife Notes Summary

Article by Dr Philip Smith

February

The longest spring drought in living memory began in February, with only half the usual rainfall. The first spring bulbs didn't mind, starting with glorious displays of Snowdrops, soon to be followed by Yellow Crocus, Early Crocus and the first daffodil cultivars, all these being garden escapes. Native Lesser Celandines didn't show until late in the month. The dry weather didn't suit mosses and liverworts but I did find the strange-looking Dilated Scalewort on Alder at Ainsdale (right).

Big tides pushed good numbers of wintering waders onto their high-tide roost near Hightown. I estimated up to 650 Oystercatchers, 600 Curlews, 240 Redshanks and 150 Sanderlings. Unfortunately, someone walked round on the beach from Formby and flushed the lot. Dry, mild, sunny conditions brought out the first insects at Wicks Path, Formby Point, including the very common Marmalade Hoverfly, Common Dronefly and Hairy-eyed Flower Fly. I was also delighted to spot the much scarcer Yellow-browed Smoothwing. Essential management works in the sand-dunes included my 'Buckthorn Bash' volunteers cutting invasive scrub on four occasions in the frontal dunes near Sands Lake, Ainsdale.

March

The first signs of spring were apparent as the month progressed but the drought continued, with only a third of the normal March rainfall in Formby. Sand-dune soils became dust-dry, resulting in the beautiful dune annuals being hard to find. These tiny flowers open and shed their seed in early spring while the soil is normally still moist. A new plant for me was Mossy Stonecrop, found last year by Steve Cross on the Lifeboat Road carpark. It has increased its range dramatically in recent years due, it is thought, to milder winters and transport of seeds on vehicles.

Common Toads and Common Frogs assembled to breed at Wicks Lake at Formby Point. I stopped to listen to the males, the frogs making a deep purring call, contrasting with the high-pitched squeak of the Common Toads. The first returning migrant birds included the Chiffchaff with its unmistakable repetitive song, while a visit to Marshside was rewarded by the amazing sight of four Spoonbills flying just over my head. Insects were slow to get going but a Brimstone butterfly motoring at high speed along Wicks Path, Formby, was a bonus. Trips to Alexandra Park, Crosby, provided sightings of Hairy-footed Flower Bees. As usual, the uncommon and high-flying Large Bumblefly was elusive but I did eventually photograph one on a tree trunk at Ainsdale (left).

3.3 Dr. Phil Smith's 2025 Wildlife Notes Summary

Article by Dr Philip Smith

April

The most severe spring drought of modern times continued throughout April, with Formby recording only 40% of average rainfall. Unsurprisingly, the sand-dune vegetation was looking parched by the end of the month. Many plants flowered early, including two superb Green-winged Orchids found at Hightown dunes last year. Many of our warmth-loving insects also responded to the weather, examples being butterflies such as the Orange Tip and Speckled Wood. Alexandra Park, Crosby, provided my first ever Dark-edged Bee Fly, while Large Red Damselflies and a Broad-bodied Chaser at Downholland Brook were about two weeks early. Amongst many hoverflies, one of my favourites is the Buff-tailed Bumblefly (right), a remarkable mimic of the familiar Common Carder Bumblebee. Another Sefton Coast speciality, the Spring Heath Robberfly, was regular on sunny fences and sandy tracks.

May

The ongoing spring drought was a recurring theme, May being relatively dry, warm and sunny. Indeed, spring 2025 was the warmest on record for the UK. As in April, many insects appeared early. My earliest ever Banded Demoiselles were flashing their incredible metallic colours at Downholland Brook on 1st.

A new 'tick' was a colourful Ant Beetle on a pine trunk at Ravenmeols. Pine Longhorns were on the same tree, this distinctive hoverfly being a recent colonist from the Caledonian forests of the Scottish Highlands. A new hoverfly for me was the spectacular Crimson-belted Leafwalker (left), a small population of which Pete Kinsella discovered at Sands Lake, Ainsdale. They were the first for Sefton since the 1950s.

A highlight of a field visit to Hightown dunes by Liverpool Museum's 'Tanyptera Project' was the native Tawny Cockroach. This tiny insect is rare away from the south of England but, fortunately, I knew the exact spot to find it. Not to be outdone, the eagle-eyed Phil Brighton identified a new fly for Britain!

3.3 Dr. Phil Smith's 2025 Wildlife Notes Summary

Article by Dr Philip Smith

June

At last, an end to the awful drought, with rain in Formby 40% above average. It was the warmest June on record in England, though we largely missed the heatwaves further south. Crosby Coastal Park was a big attraction, with over 3700 flower spikes of the nationally rare Sea-holly Broomrape (top right).

Other botanical highlights included hundreds of the British endemic Isle of Man Cabbage and five different Evening-primroses, the latter introductions from America first recorded on the dunes in 1801. I also counted 422 magenta spikes of the Southern Marsh-orchid, though this total was far fewer than last year, perhaps because of the earlier drought. Swarms of marsh-orchids also featured elsewhere along the coast, especially in the Devil's Hole and on Birkdale 'Green Beach'. New to me, the yellow-flowered Hoary Cinquefoil, was found by Liverpool Botanical Society at Birkdale Common. With friends, I began a survey of the Baltic Rush at Birkdale, its only English locality. The results will be compared with four previous surveys going back as far as 1981/82.

The warm, damp weather was perfect for insects, magnificent Dark Green Fritillaries appearing early in the month and Ringlets later. My largest count of the latter was 31 in the so-called 'Ringlet Glade' at Ravenmeols. The month's insect highlight also appeared in the same place; an enormous Musk Beetle, resplendent in British Racing Green Metallic (bottom right).

3.3 Dr. Phil Smith's 2025 Wildlife Notes Summary

Article by Dr Philip Smith

July

Oh dear; back to the drought, with only 30% of the normal July rainfall. For many years, I have studied plants colonizing the 'Green Beaches' north of Ainsdale-on-Sea. During one visit in July, I bumped into the botanist Josh Styles who was supervising students identifying plants for their Field Identification Skills Certificate (FISC). They had chosen a particularly rich habitat with getting on for 200 species and, from what I could see, most of them were struggling. Embarrassingly, Josh showed me three plants that were not on my site list. Another highlight was a giant Allium that Joyce Jarvis and Ann Anderson found at Queen's Jubilee Nature Trail, Southport. I confirmed its identity as Wild Leek, a species listed as 'extinct' on the Sefton Coast.

I rarely mention mammals in these notes, mainly because most are nocturnal and I am not. However, the Roe Deer is increasing, with numerous sightings in the dunes. I found a willow bush at Birkdale that had been 'frayed' by a buck rubbing 'velvet' from its antlers. Despite the drought, the Sefton dunes lived up to their reputation for having an incredibly rich insect fauna. Notable species were too numerous to list here but I must mention the amazing Noble Jewel Wasp (pictured) that Pete Kinsella photographed at Crosby Coastal Park. This is a southern insect that has only recently arrived here. I was also delighted to find two Verrall's Meadow Flies; a striking wasp mimic and another southerner moving north.

3.3 Dr. Phil Smith's 2025 Wildlife Notes Summary

Article by Dr Philip Smith

August

Predictably, the severe summer drought continued through August, Formby receiving only 20% of the expected rainfall. It was no surprise that insect numbers and variety collapsed, though there were some highlights, including a Clifden Nonpareil moth (right) that Richard Walker light-trapped at Formby Point.

This almost mythical giant moth was the Victorian collector's 'Holy Grail'. It became extinct before recently recolonising southern Britain. I had never seen one, so Richard brought it round to show me before release. The beautifully camouflaged fore-wings parted to reveal a dazzling electric blue band on the hind-wings, no doubt intended to scare potential predators.

The southern slacks of the Green Beach provided a wonderful display of gleaming white Grass-of-Parnassus. My great friend, the late Trevor Davenport, used to say "You couldn't grow a garden like that." An iconic feature of the Sefton dunes, this plant is Red-listed 'vulnerable' in England. Thankfully, I found the energy to continue a long-term study of the nationally rare willow Salix x friesiana in the Devil's Hole, with the eventual aim of publishing the results.

3.3 Dr. Phil Smith's 2025 Wildlife Notes Summary

Article by Dr Philip Smith

September

Following a record dry spring and summer, September was relatively wet, with Formby rainfall about 60% above normal. This led to a late emergence of insects, though nothing like the expected variety. Flowering Ivy is a major source of nectar and pollen in September, attracting particularly the Ivy Bee. This charming solitary bee has only been with us since 2018. It is about the same size as a Honeybee but with a humbug-banded abdomen. Having first appeared in southern England in 2001, it has rapidly pushed north and is now in southern Scotland. On one of my favourite woodland walks, I spotted an unfamiliar vivid red-and-green insect that turned out to be a Rhododendron Leafhopper, an American species, introduced to southern England in the 1930s. We seem to be close to its northern limit on this side of the country.

Finally, Pete Kinsella sent me a lovely photograph of an almost completely white 'leucistic' Sanderling at Hall Road, Blundellsands (right). It had also been photographed at New Brighton. An almost identical Sanderling was recorded in New Hampshire, USA, in October 2019. They do migrate across the North Atlantic, so could it be the same individual?

3.3 Dr. Phil Smith's 2025 Wildlife Notes Summary

Article by Dr Philip Smith

September

Marshside had an Australian Black Swan, no doubt "Escaped from some duck zoo" as Eric Hardy used to say. Crossens Marsh was covered in about 2000 feral Canada Geese; an extraordinary sight. Also unexpected was a flock of 33 Cattle Egrets near Martin Mere. The Lancashire Bird Report describes "An incredible 39" seen in the same area last year. These birds were extreme rarities a few years ago. The volunteer 'Buckthorn Bashers' met for their 13th year to clear invasive scrub on the dunes at Ainsdale.

It was also encouraging that Green Sefton, Natural England and the National Trust continued their major programmes of scrub control using big machines, while English Longhorn cattle (right) were employed to prevent the scrub coming back.

October

The month was duller, warmer and drier than average, with 20% less rainfall than expected. Mainly cloudy weather meant that insects were thin on the ground, though Dock Bugs, together with Hawthorn and Parent Shieldbugs were numerous on the outskirts of Formby. Flowering Ivy was disappointingly quiet; just a few Ivy Bees with the occasional Red Admiral and Hornet Plumehorn, the latter being our largest hoverfly.

3.4 Dr. Phil Smith's November Wildlife Notes

Article by Dr Philip Smith

According to the Met. Office, November was warmer, wetter and sunnier than normal. England had about 49% more rain than the average, tying in remarkably well with Rachael Parks data from her Formby garden. She measured 140.5 mm, of rainfall, which is roughly 48% more than the long-term average for the district. November is usually one of the wettest months of the year but this one was exceptionally so, with measurable rain in Formby on 23 days and an uplift of about 30 cm in the sand-dune water-table.

I'm not so keen on getting wet these days, so I didn't get out as much as usual. November is a fairly quiet month for wildlife in any event, though there were several exceptions. One major highlight came on 1st when Pete Kinsella photographed an Asian Hornet on Ivy (bottom left) in the Marine Gardens, Crosby. This notorious recent invader from the continent makes bee-keepers go weak at the knees. So far there have been few sightings in the North of England but, when Pete notified the authorities, the balloon went up and the Animal & Plant Health Agency's Regional Bee Inspector had special traps set up. The hornet was last seen heading north at high speed and none was trapped. I went down to Crosby the following day. No sign of the Asian Hornet but I did identify six species of common hoverflies on the Ivy, while a late female Ivy Bee was busily collecting pollen. An unfamiliar grass in the gardens turned out to be Cockspur, a non-native species from the tropics that occasionally turns up on disturbed ground. Garden escapes on the outskirts of Formby included Italian Arum and Sowbread *Cyclamen hederifolium* (bottom right), easily recognised by their strongly pattered leaves...

To continue reading, please follow this link

3.5 NBN Lifetime Award

Celebrating Wildlife Recording Excellence

Article by Elina-Marielle Doss

The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Awards once again shone a spotlight on the incredible contributions of individuals and groups who help build the UK's biodiversity evidence base. Announced at the NBN Conference in Bristol, the awards recognised achievements across seven categories, from young recorders to lifetime contributors.

This year's Lifetime Achievement Award went to a very familiar name in our area, **Dr Philip Smith** – for his outstanding dedication to the natural world in terms of research and data collection, contributing over 37,000 verified records to the NBN Atlas. The Verifier's Award was presented to Ashleigh Whiffin for her meticulous work validating insect records. With 28 finalists selected from around 45 nominations, the awards highlight the vital role of volunteers and professionals in ensuring high-quality wildlife data, which is essential for guiding nature conservation efforts.

Phil was completely unaware of the fact that we had nominated him for the 'Lifetime Achievement Award'. Unfortunately, he was unable to accept the award in person and couldn't give a brief 'speech' but you can find a few words from him on the next page

Juncus balticus survey Birkdale

3.5 NBN Lifetime Award

Celebrating Wildlife Recording Excellence

Article by Elina-Marielle Doss

“If you don't know what you've got you can't conserve it."

That has been my mantra for over 60 years, during which I have organised and/or contributed to innumerable wildlife recording schemes, from shorebirds counts on Morecambe Bay in the 1960s to iRecord, with an emphasis on insects in recent years. My observations have sometimes added to evidence needed to establish National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves and County Wildlife Trust reserves. Excitement also comes from finding out something new; perhaps clarifying the distribution of a rare plant, or the first record of an insect on its way north due to climate change. A motivation for this work comes from observing, during my long life, the decline of British wildlife and wild places and the desire to make a small contribution to slowing that trend.

My academic background has convinced me of the importance of formally recording sightings, undertaking surveys and, where possible, publishing the results, often illustrated by my own photographs. To that end, I have written well over 500 scientific papers, reports and articles, mainly about the Sefton Coast and its fantastic wildlife.

A huge congratulations to Phil again from everyone at Merseyside BioBank and Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service.

To find out more about this years, winners, nominees and highly commended recorders, click here

3.6 Our Love Affair with Bats

A short history of the MWLBG and why join us

Article by Charlie Liggett (MWLBG), edited by David Hopkins

A Brief History of the Group

Attempts to form a bat group began in 1982, but the Merseyside and West Lancashire Bat Group came to fruition in early 1984. The group quickly grew to 100 members, including Dr Peter and Dr Maggie Andrews, Stan Irwin, Lou Wisniewski, Fiona Angwin, Dr Clem Fisher, and Steve Woolfall. Steve and Clem, then at Liverpool Museum, were central to the group's growth through access to its facilities (which ended after the 2005 renovation).

Brown Long-Eared Bat *Plecotus auritus*

All worked tirelessly for bats. Fiona contributed enormously, while Peter served as Chairman and later President until his passing in 2011. Bat work was very different then - detectors were basic, calls masked by static, and Peter built his own devices for long-term monitoring of Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats at Stackpole. Lou trained members for Roost Visitor Licences; by 1985, 24 licences had been issued to respond to calls from the Bat Conservation Trust, vets, companies, and the public. One memorable visit saw Lou meet a farmer's wife who wore a pan on her head when collecting laundry - fearing bats in her hair!

3.6 Our Love Affair with Bats

A short history of the MWLBG and why join us

Article by Charlie Liggett (MWLBG), edited by David Hopkins

Our work and approach

Activities included house visits, public bat walks, hibernation surveys in North Wales, monitoring bat boxes, and contributing to the National Bat Monitoring Programme. Training often involved catching bats as they emerged to show species and sex. For house visits, having a good rapport is key, convincing people bat's are beautiful, explaining rabies risks honestly, and reassuring them about property damage. Sadly, there are now fewer bat carers to respond to these calls.

MWLGB during a training session in the early 2000s, Birkenhead Park.

Changing times and the future

Technology has transformed bat work, consultants and passive detectors dominate, with surveys analysed on screens and algorithms suggesting species. I never learned these "black arts" and leave them to members like Liam, Anthony, or Stan. Personally, I treasure time spent watching bats in the wild, observing flight patterns and behaviour without machines.

Thanks to Stan and Anthony, the group has enjoyed a renaissance, with membership near 100 again. My race is almost run, and we need enthusiastic new members with energy and expertise **to join the committee!** These magnificent animals deserve far better than recent political moves stripping their legal protection.

I hope to see you at the next AGM in March, happy batting, and don't miss winter hibernacula visits! If you experience even a fraction of the joy I've had with bats, you'll be very lucky.

3.7 North West Mammal Group and North Merseyside Mammal Group

Article by Elina Marielle-Doss

After the launch of the North West Mammal Recorder Network in November 2024, things are slowly starting to develop. In 2025, the group met up 3 times, i.e. in February, June and November with attendance ranging from 8 to 20 people. With a bit of a slower start, the North Merseyside Mammal Group has also had one meeting in March 2025 and is looking to organise another meeting in early 2026.

The North West Mammal Recorder Network has also launched its first newsletter, which you can see on the next page. We are in the process of organising various training sessions, mainly in North Merseyside and the Cheshire area, some of which are advertised in the newsletter.

These include:

- Small mammal trapping at Speke Hall and Knowsley Safari Park from April to November
- Harvest Mouse surveys, which have already started and are happening once a month until February/March, led by Merseyside BioBank in North Merseyside
- Owl pellet dissection workshops held at Knowsley Safari Park, the Merseyside BioBank office in Huyton, Liverpool, as well as the RECORD office in Chester
- Marine mammal spotting at Hilbre Island and Liverpool Bay
- Brown hare surveys in Merseyside, led by Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service and Merseyside BioBank

If you want to join the mailing list, please email me at elina@merseysidebiobank.org.uk

You can also join our private Facebook Group where we share a multitude of events and important information.

NORTH WEST MAMMAL NETWORK

Summer 2025 Highlights

A good year for bats!

Bat surveys across the region were positive this year, supported by much stronger insect populations than we have seen in recent years. The most commonly recorded species were: Common and Soprano Pipistrelles and Noctules.

A good year for Red Squirrels!

Lancashire Wildlife Trust red squirrel project is now working with partners Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Bright Green Nature, Knowsley Safari UK Squirrel Accord, Bright Green Nature Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere, and Restoring Upland Nature to form the Red Squirrel Recovery Network.

They will be working together to improve and link up red squirrel habitat, support a network of volunteers and citizen scientists, monitor squirrel populations. LWT autumn monitoring has just finished, and early data analysis shows a breeding success and an increase in numbers. Follow their work here: https://www.facebook.com/share/1Q6gtY16Qj/

Successful seal spotting

Thank you to all those who joined us on our two trips to Hilbre Island this summer. Both groups saw seals and many sea bird species. We will run these trips again in the new year.

Mammal Society Annual Conference Bursary

The Mammal Society are hosting their Annual Conference in Inverness 27th - 28th March 2026. They are offering bursaries to those who are members of local groups (like ours), deadline 30th November. To apply for the bursary and for more info scan the QR code:

Harvest Mouse survey season has begun

Join one of the events to the right, or if you'd rather survey on your own schedule, see guidance here: https://mammal.org.uk/current-research/national-harvest-mouse-survey

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Small Mammal Trapping - Speke Hall & Knowsley Safari:

Look out for opportunities to join rangers at Speke Hall April - September 2026.
At Knowsley Safari - these will be the last Thursday (evening) and Friday (morning) of the month through April - Sept 2026.

Harvest Mouse Surveys - Kindling Farm

Join Merseyside BioBank at Kindling Farm 4th December:

https://tinyurl.com/3ab8f3db

Password= MBB2025

Biological Recording Company 2026 Webinars

The BRC have a winter webinar series for ecology skills, some free, some paid: https://tinyurl.com/yzrfac3c

Owl Pellet Dissection - Dates to Follow

Join us at Knowsley Safari and Merseyside BioBank in January 2026 and to dissect owl pellets to find small mammal bones. Develop your skeleton ID skills and determine which small mammal made up the owls' meal.

https://www.facebook.com/groups/1011114887452896/ nwmammals@gmail.com

3.8 NMARG Habitat Management

Events on the Sefton Coast

Article by Elina Marielle-Doss

The North Merseyside Amphibian and Reptile Group (NMARG) is back with a new season of habitat management events, offering a fantastic opportunity to get hands-on with conservation work along the beautiful Sefton Coast.

NMARG is a small, passionate, volunteer-led network dedicated to monitoring, recording, and protecting some of the UK's rarest amphibians and reptiles across North Merseyside, particularly the Sefton Coast's rare sand lizard and natterjack toad. The group works year-round to restore and maintain vital dune habitats – clearing invasive plants in winter and creating sandy patches for breeding in spring and summer. NMARG also runs surveys, training sessions, and community events to help people discover and record local amphibians and reptiles.

When?

Events will run every other Tuesday and Sunday in January from Sunday 4th January and Tuesday 6th January 2026 until the end of February. Keep checking our social media channels and monthly bulletin too for more updates.

What to Expect

Volunteers will be helping with scrub and small tree removal, vital work to maintain and restore habitats for local wildlife. The Tuesday sessions are especially exciting, as they often involve collaboration with the Green Sefton Rangers, who bring along power tools and even a fire to help tackle denser vegetation and larger trees.

Where?

All events are expected to take place along the Sefton Coast, with specific locations to be confirmed closer to each date.

Please note that dates may be subject to change or cancellation, but this schedule should give a good indication of when events will take place. If you're interested in attending any of the habitat management sessions, please get in touch via info@merseysidebiobank so we can connect you to the NMARG leader.

4. UK Recording

In this section you'll find...

4.1 BTO 2025 Articles

Click to jump to articles

4.2 Wildlife Success Stories 2025

4.1 BTO 2025 Articles

Article by Paul Round

Inferring European Nightjar Caprimulgus europaeus Behaviour from Acoustic Signals

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

This year, the BTO had a focus on heathland birds including the monitoring of Nightjars. Being nocturnal, detecting them requires dedicated night-time field surveys. Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) can be a useful tool to help in Nightjar monitoring. Programmable audio recorders can be deployed in the daytime and left to record for extended periods. Software like the BTO Acoustic Pipeline that can then be used to efficiently scan the many hours of collected audio searching for Nightjar vocalisations. This type of digital surveying can be especially useful in areas of low Nightjar density.

Nightjars are probably most well-known for the continuous churring song produced by males. This vocalisation has a slow and a fast version which males use interchangeably. Adult males and females, and juveniles also produce a nasal “groeek” call, which is most often given in flight. This data will provide crucial information on monitoring Nightjar numbers across the UK.

Link for reference:
Inferring Nightjar behaviour from acoustic signals | BTO

4.1 BTO 2025 Articles

Article by Paul Round

BTO Northern Ireland Marine Bird Evidence Review 2024: Marine Bird Spatial Use in the Celtic Seas

Kittiwake Rissa tridactyla and chick nesting on the coast.

The health of Northern Ireland's marine ecosystems can affect a large number of biological, social, and commercial processes. Seabirds are an indicator of marine health thanks to their function as top predators in marine ecosystems. Britain and Ireland hold an internationally important number of seabirds, which makes monitoring those populations key to their conservation. Gathering distribution data for seabirds can help in understanding potential threats. Whilst there have been various reviews of seabird distribution, their results remain in different data repositories and other datasets are yet to be combined in a meta-analysis. In addition to seabirds, other bird species also utilise the marine environment, but have received less monitoring effort and so knowledge gaps remain.

37 marine birds found offshore, away from the coastline, that utilise the Celtic Seas (OSPAR Region III) and Ireland Exclusive Economic Zone marine environments. We compiled meta-data from 10 different sources. Data types were grouped into 12 categories which ranged from remote tracking technologies to direct observations. The occurrence of each species within each tracking method was compiled.

Kittiwake Rissa tridactyla was represented by 10 data types, four more were represented by nine, and six species represented by only two or three data types. Foraging hot spots were identified for nine of the 37 species, identifying a gap in understanding of foraging hot spots off the northern coast of the island of Ireland. Some 14 of the 37 species had been tracked using satellite tags, and nine tracked using GLS tags. The low proportion of species covered suggests a need for further research into tracking a wider range of marine bird species to better understand marine bird at-sea usage, further their conservation, and inform governance and policy.

Link for reference: BTO Northern Ireland Marine Bird Evidence Review 2024: marine bird spatial use in the Celtic Seas | BTO

4.1 BTO 2025 Articles

Article by Paul Round

Nightingales Luscinia megarhynchos Breeding in the UK and Unusual Degree of Migratory Connectivity to their Non-breeding Range in West Africa

Singing Nightingale

BTO research uses tracking data to demonstrate that Nightingales breeding in the UK have an unusual degree of migratory connectivity to their non-breeding range in West Africa, with wider implications for both the UK conservation of this fast-declining species and for the conservation of migratory species in general. This study used a combination of geolocator and GPS tracking devices, fitted to Nightingales at both their UK breeding grounds and their non-breeding grounds in West Africa, to provide data on their birds' movements between 2009 and 2024. Data was also analysed ringing data collected between 2000 and 2022, and used data from other research studies which tagged Nightingales breeding in different parts of Europe.

The results showed that Nightingales breeding in the UK overwinter in a very restricted area of West Africa, centred on The Gambia. This migratory movement between the species' breeding range in eastern and southern England, and their non-breeding quarters is an example of extreme migratory connectivity; Nightingales breeding in other parts of Europe overwinter in a much larger area of West Africa, and do not therefore show this degree of connectivity. The study found very little mixing on the non-breeding grounds between UK-breeding Nightingales and those breeding elsewhere, so any issues affecting the UK Nightingales' overwintering location primarily feed into UK breeding population declines, but not population trends in other parts of Europe. Moreover, the small non-breeding range of UK Nightingales makes this population more vulnerable to negative changes in this region than their European-breeding counterparts, which are more buffered from such changes by their larger non-breeding range, not all of which will be affected to the same extent.

Link for reference: Extreme migratory connectivity and mirroring of non-breeding grounds conditions in a severely declining breeding population of an Afro-Palearctic migratory bird | BTO

4.2 Wildlife Success Stories 2025

Article by Paul Round

Large Marsh Grasshopper Stethophyma grossum Reintroduction

The Large Marsh Grasshopper Stethophyma grossum is restricted to the southern regions of England but the Norfolk's wetlands will once again echo with the distinctive ticking calls of the Large Marsh Grasshopper following its successful reintroduction after an 86-year absence.

Large Marsh Grasshopper
Stethophyma grossum

Citizen Zoo's Hop of Hope project has seen this rare species return to Norfolk through innovative conservation techniques. The project allowed volunteers to home-rear and release thousands of grasshoppers at restored wetland sites, where habitat degradation previously led to the species' decline.

We're delighted with the Hop for Hope project's progress through our Species Recovery Programme Capital Grants. Our partners have developed groundbreaking techniques using pre-incubated eggs to establish new populations in Norfolk sites where bog and fen habitats are thriving. These grasshoppers are not just surviving, but breeding and creating sustainable populations, demonstrating nature's incredible resilience when given the right support.

The project's most recent success, in the Norfolk Broads, saw large marsh grasshoppers hatched in the wild for the first time since 1939. It advances the government's commitment to halt species decline by 2030, forming part of broader efforts to create England's Nature Recovery Network.

Link for reference: A rare grasshopper returns to Norfolk after more than 85 years - GOV.UK

4.2 Wildlife Success Stories 2025

Article by Paul Round

Red-billed Chough Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax Reintroduction – Kent

A young Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* has successfully taken flight from a wild nest in Dover, marking the first time in more than two centuries that the rare bird has lived independently in the wild in Kent.

Red-billed Chough
Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax

Earlier this spring, a nest was discovered at Dover Castle, which produced the chick that successfully fledged last month.

This remarkable milestone comes just three years after the launch of an ambitious reintroduction programme, led by Wildwood Trust, Kent Wildlife Trust, and Paradise Wildlife Park. The successful fledging marks a significant step forward in restoring this species to its natural habitat.

The successful fledging follows last year's nesting attempt, which sadly ended when the chick went missing at the fledging stage during severe weather. This year, however, the young bird appears to be thriving, offering hope for the continued growth of the population.

The news comes as the third season of Chough releases gets underway.

Link for reference: Chough Reintroduction Project | Kent Wildlife Trust

4.2 Wildlife Success Stories 2025

Article by Paul Round

Ten Years Of Nature-friendly Farming

A survey of 27 farms across 14,600 hectares shows increases in rare Butterfly Orchid Platanthera chlorantha and red-listed Nightingale Luscinia megarhynchos. A decade-long nature-friendly farming project has helped to increase the diversity and abundance of wildlife across farmlands.

Farmland covers more than 70% of the UK's land area and farmers are therefore critical in helping bring about nature's recovery. The farmers that grow oats for Jordans Cereals provide an area equivalent to almost 30% of their farmed area for wildlife such as Barn Owl Tyto alba, Brown Hare Lepus europaeus, Corn Bunting Emberiza calandra and vital pollinating insects like Bees.

A farmland specialist the Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemu*

By working with British oat farmers on LEAF Marque certified farms, the Jordans Farm Partnership has seen hedgerow length on the farms that provide food and shelter for wildlife stretch to 621km. If put end to end, this is longer than the distance between London and Edinburgh. At Park Farm in Northamptonshire, farmer Roger Forster has planted wildflower meadows and margins as well as introduced wild bird seed plots and supplementary bird feeding. As a result, he said they had seen a noticeable increase in bees and birds.

The Jordans Farm Partnership between The Wildlife Trusts, Jordans Cereals and LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming), has seen 27 farms across England develop bespoke conservation plans to help improve wildlife habitat on their farm. This includes creating features like hedgerows, field margins and ponds, and improving habitat connectivity with neighbouring landowners.
Since the partnership began in 2015, over half the participating farmers say they have seen new or returning species, many of which are endangered and of conservation concern, including birds appearing on the UK's Red List for Birds such as Tree Sparrow Passer montanus, Nightingale Luscinia megarhynchos and Goshawk Accipiter gentilis, and the rare plant Meadow Clary Salvia pratensis, which is only found at 26 sites across the UK. Other success stories include the return of breeding Stone Curlew Burhinus oedicnemus in Hampshire, Scarce Emerald Damselfly Lestes dryas in Suffolk and Brown Hare Lepus europaeus in Leicestershire.

Link for reference: Ten years of nature-friendly breakfasts helps rare birds, bees and butterflies return | The Wildlife Trusts

5. Projects

In this section you'll find...

Click to jump to articles

5.1 Local Wildlife Sites

2025 Update

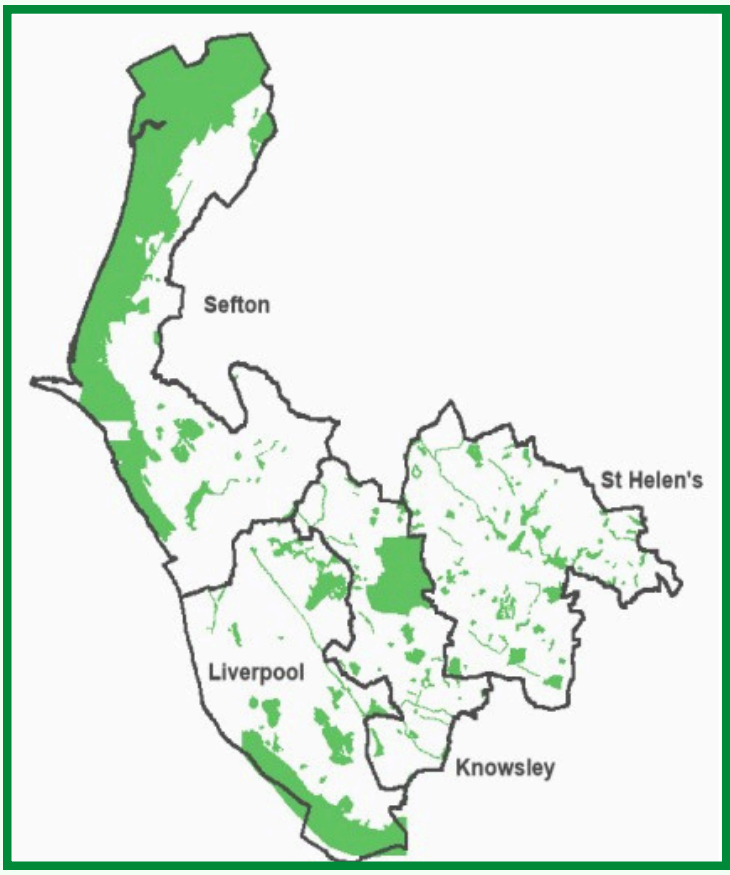
Article by Matthew Sharples

MEAS, in association with Merseyside BioBank, partner organisations/individuals, local experts and volunteers, are responsible for monitoring the condition of Local Wildlife Sites on behalf of the Local Sites Partnership and North Merseyside's District Authorities. Partnership organisations include Local Authorities, statutory organisations, conservation organisations, local recorders, 'friends of' groups and others.

The LSP has met twice in 2025 and will be meeting again in early 2026 to continue to guide, identify and designate LWS, co-ordinate monitoring, and to provide and co-ordinate management. There are 266 LWS's in North Merseyside covering ~ 25% of the total land area. There is a target to monitor ten percent of these sites, or more if time permits, each year. This year we surveyed 10%, which due to a shift in the timing of our "monitoring season" (more about that a bit later) has been a good result.

Local Sites will play a vital role in creating our Nature Recovery Network as we await the official launch of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Our Local Wildlife Sites identified as locally important based on their habitats and species, are vital for providing a refuge for biodiversity and linking ecological networks. Work to improve habitat on sites is also being targeted by local authorities as potential Biodiversity Net Gain sites and we are continuing to work with private and public landowners to provide targeted conservation management advice and monitoring results to improve the conservation health of LWS .

This year has seen a shift in our monitoring season to align with the calendar year running from January to December. After discussions at the LSP meeting in February this year it was agreed and monitoring for 2025 will now follow the monitoring from 2024-2025. We look forward to working with partners in 2026 to ensure Local Sites remain central to protecting our local biodiversity. Keep your eye on the monthly bulletin, the MEAS and BioBank websites and social channels for more news on LWS in the coming months and for changes to inform and guide the future of these important assets.



For more information on Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites, click here

5.2 Local Geological Sites

2025 Update

Article by: Ayse Ozcan

During 2025, MEAS completed work to digitise the Local Geological sites records which date back to 1996, allowing for digital access to site information, maps and site surveys. MEAS hold the geological records on behalf of Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and St. Helens. A Partnership group has also been set up including MEAS team members, local universities and the Liverpool Geological Society (LGS). The group discussed actions to move forward site monitoring and how the process can be mutually beneficial for students, staff, society members, as well as the Local Authorities.

A process has been agreed to enable sites are to be monitored by interested parties/students with quality assurance by university staff and the LGS prior to being submitted to MEAS for recording and passing to the Local Authorities to ensure the right sites are protected under local plans. The site monitoring will give students direct geological experience at all levels from undergraduate degrees to PhDs, as well as general interest for the LGS members who study the local geology and are able to provide key knowledge and updated information.

MEAS is currently finalising the monitoring form, the creation of the North Merseyside Local Geological website and creating avenues to be able to share information between all parties involved. It is anticipated that in the new year universities can start monitoring sites with students along with input from the LGS partnership, using the website to share information.

5.3 Biodiversity Net Gain

2025 Annual Round Up

Article by Jasmine Leather

We are now about 20 months into mandatory BNG, and we are seeing the first few developments begin works on their onsite habitats, having met the mandatory conditions. The industry is slowly getting the hang of it, and we are seeing developers actively seeking to retain and provide habitats, such as neutral grasslands, trees, scrub and hedges, where previously amenity grass would have been the 'go-to' or there'd be no habitat left onsite at all. We have two active habitat banks within the region, which are thriving, and there are more in the pipeline; we will also soon see the first council-owned habitat banks coming forwards, which is hugely positive for the local green economy and for our biodiversity. [RR1] BNG offers a funding stream that can be directed toward enhancing existing local greenspaces and wildlife sites or creating new ones. It will also push the development of skills and knowledge in greenspace management and nature restoration.

Despite the wins, BNG remains complex and not without challenges. One issue that ecologists must tackle, is ensuring that the habitat-based 'metric' works effectively alongside existing protections for species and sites. For example, farmland habitats that are crucial to many of our threatened bird species, are generally assigned low-to-medium value in the metric. Ecologists understand this and can suggest habitat enhancements that generate BNG units alongside protection of bird habitat. This results in enhanced diversity and species recovery i.e. nature restoration.

The recent government consultation on BNG raised several questions about exempting more types of developments and mentioned other points that potentially weaken BNG. However, government has reiterated its commitment to nature recovery alongside building houses. The consultation did also offer some potential solutions to thorny issues like how to compensate open mosaic habitat and suggested exempting conservation projects from BNG (which is much needed!). We are still waiting on the outcome of this consultation.

Below are some of the initiatives that MEAS has established to support implementation within the LCR.

Fortnightly BNG surgeries
Drop-in Teams meeting for planners with any BNG queries. This also helps upskill the planners over time

BNG training
We have provided several training sessions internally at MEAS/Biobank, and to our LPA planning and validation teams, landowners and people in the development industry (e.g. architects and agents)

Support
Assisting local authorities in developing habitat banks. Monthly Planning Policy Manager meetings with all our LPA representatives. These meetings cover wider BNG issues including habitat banks, software, local plans/policies, biodiversity reporting, etc

Resources and outreach
We have published several guides on various aspects of BNG and how it is being implemented locally, namely the LCR BNG Information Note. We also offer resources and help via our website, and the investinginnaturelcr.com website

5.3 Biodiversity Net Gain

2025 Annual Round Up

Article by Jasmine Leather

We have also been tracking BNG, from the planning applications we have been consulted on. Although it is still early days in terms of data and trends, we were able to pick out a few interesting points in a recent analysis of this dataset. From February 2025 (mandatory date) to September 2025 we reviewed 131 applications that were subject to BNG, 86 of these achieved full 10% BNG on the development site itself (66%), and 45 (44%) required some offsite provision (purchasing units from habitat banks) in order to meet BNG.

To date, developers are doing a relatively good job at providing biodiversity on their sites and are providing a diverse array of habitats. Generally, we see that offsite units are needed where developments are inherently unable to provide much onsite (i.e. all of the site is needed by the development footprint) or where the baseline value was particularly high (e.g. a high value habitat was present). We do have several large developments coming forward soon that are likely to require significant offsite BNG, and we are keen to see that provided in local habitat banks so there is no biodiversity loss from our region and are therefore doing all we can to support new habitat banks.

From an MBB perspective, every metric we review (and for which we have permission), is saved to our internal system to be harvested by the BioBank. This is valuable habitat data from areas that otherwise would never be surveyed ecologically, helping to provide a picture of habitat land cover in our region, and hopefully over time, will show the positive impacts of BNG.

To summarise, we have seen BNG make a real difference at a local scale- small pockets of habitat now exist where once they would have disappeared altogether. Especially in urban settings, this is invaluable to maintaining connectivity and functions such as pollination. We are slowly seeing positive steps at a larger scale too and are excited to see more habitat banks bloom in our area. We eagerly await the results of the recent consultation and are hoping BNG remains strong but becomes a little more streamlined. All our LPAs have to publish their biodiversity duty report early 2026, so look out for these which will detail how the districts have implemented their wider duty to enhance local biodiversity.

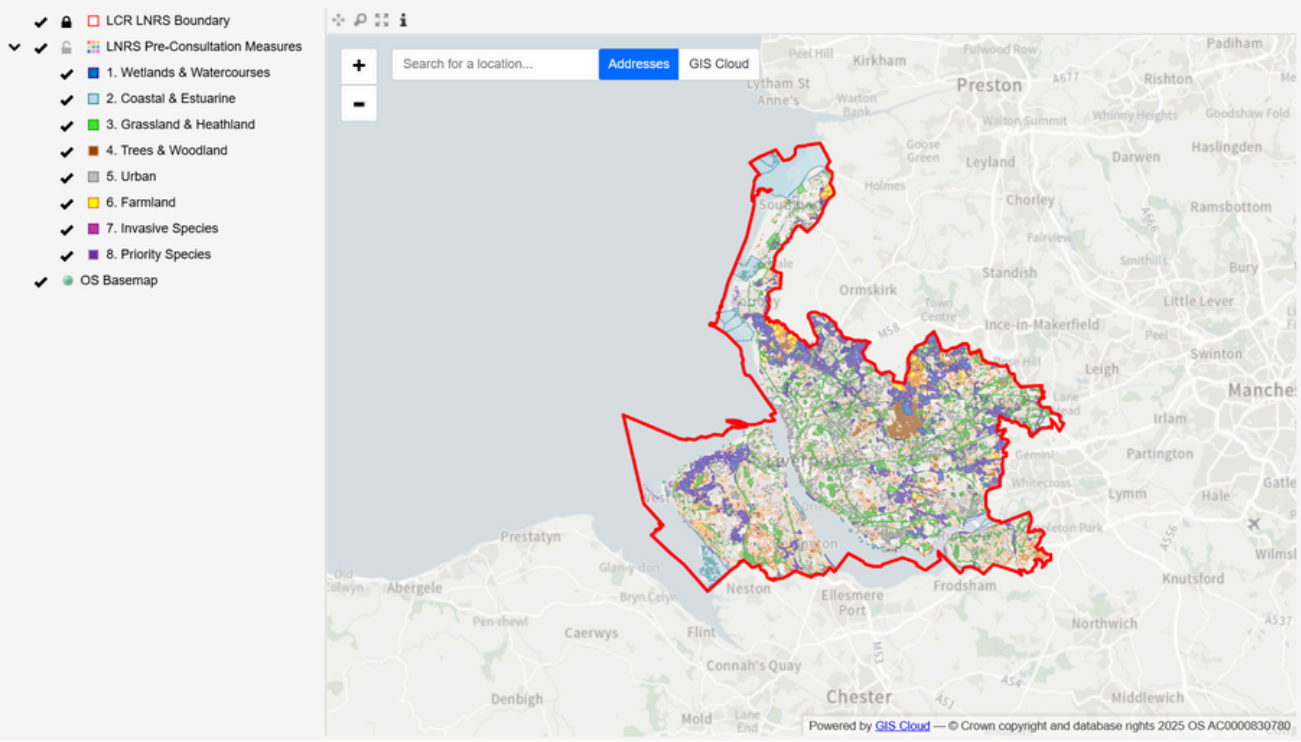
5.4 Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Liverpool City Region 2025 Update

Article by Andrew Clarke

At the time of writing, 15 of 48 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) have been published across England. This is marked step forward towards a functionally national recovery network. In Liverpool City Region, our Responsible Authority for LNRS preparation, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, has made good progress this year.

In Spring, the LNRS went to consultation on a range of 35 priorities for nature recovery covering a broad spectrum of 80+ actions for species and habitats. The LNRS has been overwhelmingly well received and with support from Local Environmental Record Centres, Merseyside BioBank and CheshireRECORD, is founded on local data and addresses the trends of decline outlined in the State of Nature Report compiled by Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service and Merseyside BioBank in 2022.



Liverpool City Region LNRS Map available on the LCR Combined Authority website.
Please note: The LCRCA LNRS is not yet published and this is a *draft* map produced for consultation purposes. The map will be updated when the strategy is published.

5.4 Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Liverpool City Region 2025 Update

Article by Andrew Clarke

The Responsible Authority has now finalised the LNRS and a submission version is complete and going through Local Authority approvals. We expect the LNRS to be published in the near future, but an exact date is currently unknown. In the meantime, Nature Connected, the Local Nature Partnership for the Liverpool City Region, working with the Responsible Authority has formed a Delivery Partnership which met for the first time in November 2025.

This partnership brings together key actors who have a role in implementation and delivery of nature recovery locally.

On behalf of the Responsible Authority and Nature Connected, Merseyside BioBank wishes to thank all naturalists and local wildlife groups who voluntarily gave their time to help ensure the LNRS is locally-led and representative of the dynamic environments.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy Statement of Biodiversity Priorities published on the LCR Combined Authority website.

5.5 Nature, Towns & Cities

National Heritage Lottery Funding 2025

Article by Elina-Marielle Doss

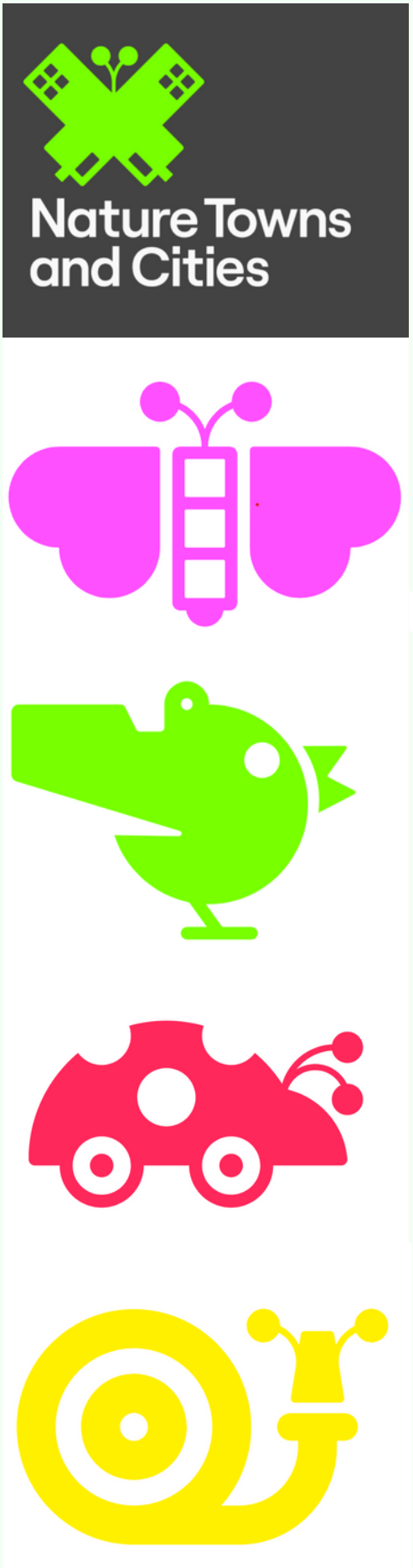
The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has been awarded £1million to help communities design and develop grass roots projects to restore the natural environment. The grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Nature Towns and Cities initiative will unlock long-term investment in nature across the city region.

It is aimed at scaling up a pipeline of impactful projects – building on the recent Local Nature Recovery Strategy consultation and the Mayor's Community Environment Fund, which has already supported 120 local projects including community gardens, bikes for veterans, beekeeping and food-growing initiatives.

Developed in partnership with Nature Connected, the Liverpool City Region's Local Nature Partnership, the new investment will be used to harness the collective power of people, organisations and nature networks to help restore vital ecosystems, including woodlands, wetlands, and grasslands.

The first of its kind, this new programme announced by Natural England, National Trust and The National Lottery Heritage Fund aims to help at least 100 places across the UK to become greener, healthier, happier places for people to live and work. Kickstarting the programme, 40 towns and cities across 19 partnerships will receive grants from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. In the North West, Blackpool, Liverpool City Region, Salford and Manchester received a total of £2.6m to help ensure people living in their areas can enjoy nature and green spaces close to home.

Both Merseyside BioBank and Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service are involved in this 3-year project and we cannot wait to share project updates as we go along so watch this space!



5.6 LCR Waxcap Grasslands Project 2025

Article by Elina-Marielle Doss & Matthew Sharples

We're excited to announce the launch of a new iNaturalist project dedicated to recording waxcap grassland fungi - a vibrant and ecologically significant group of fungi that thrive in unimproved grasslands.
It will be very similar to the Lancashire Waxcaps Project
Lancashire Waxcaps · iNaturalist United Kingdom

Waxcaps, or more specifically CHEGD fungi, are not only visually striking, with their bright reds, yellows, and greens, but they also serve as key indicators of high-quality, species-rich grassland habitats that take centuries to develop. These habitats are increasingly rare due to agricultural intensification and land-use changes, making waxcap fungi vital markers for conservation efforts.

The CHEGD species are:

Clavioids	Hygrocybe	Entoloma	Geoglossum	Dermoloma
Spindles, Clubs, and Coral fungi	Waxcaps	Pinkgills	Earth tongues and relatives	Crazed caps and relatives

There is more information on CHEGD grassland available from CIEEM here.

5.6 LCR Waxcap Grasslands Project 2025

Article by Elina-Marielle Doss & Matthew Sharples

Why record Waxcaps?

🍄🟫 Ecological Indicators: Waxcaps are sensitive to soil disturbance and nutrient enrichment, making them excellent indicators of habitat quality.

🌱 Conservation Value: Their presence often correlates with other rare and threatened grassland species.

📈 Data Gaps: Many areas remain under-recorded, and your observations can help fill these gaps.

How to get involved:

- Join the “Liverpool City Region Waxcaps” project on iNaturalist **here**
- Upload your sightings with clear photos and location details.
- Share the project with your networks to encourage wider participation.

Other useful resources:

- Plantlife Free Online Grassland Fungi Course
- Plantlife Waxcaps and Grassland Fungi Guide
- Plantlife Waxcap Watch Video
- Moor Meadows The Wonderful World of Waxcap Grasslands

By contributing to this iNaturalist project, local recorders, naturalists, and fungi enthusiasts can help build a clearer picture of where waxcap grasslands still exist and how they are changing. Every record submitted helps inform land management decisions and supports biodiversity monitoring across the region. Whether you're a seasoned mycologist or a curious nature lover, your records can make a real difference. Let’s work together to protect these beautiful fungi and the precious habitats they represent.

For those interested in learning more please take a look at the Northwest Fungus Group’s web page https://northwestfungusgroup.com/

5.7 Ancient Woodland Inventory

Article by Jo Doolin

This year has been a great year for monitoring North Merseyside's Ancient Woodlands. Whilst the very hot weather meant the season was shorter than we'd prefer, we were still able to visit and survey several sites on our list, as did many other organisations involved in the project.

The season started with members of Biobank, MEAS and Mersey Forest, along with several Biobank volunteers visiting Sankey Valley Woods with Steven Cross from the Liverpool Botanical Society. Steve showed us around several of the woodland parcels and took us through several ancient woodland indicators in North Merseyside and the specific woodland habitats they are found in. Following this training day, participants were encouraged to visit woodlands near them to search for woodland indicators and report back on their findings.

An amazing total of 15 sites were surveyed through Biobank, MEAS and other members of the newly formed Ancient Woodland Panel. Some surveys found woodlands overgrown with invasive species such as rhododendron, lacking in management, and impacted by human activities. These woodlands lacked the indicators necessary to identify them as ancient woodland, so they were removed from the inventory. However, many of the surveys found various ancient woodland indicators, carpets of bluebells and a diverse woodland structure worthy of remaining on the list.

Our final updated ancient woodland layer was submitted to Natural England in September, and we hope to see it published soon. The Ancient Woodland Panel will meet next in 2026 (watch this space!). We will continue to survey more woodlands on our list and encourage other organisations and volunteers to explore local woodlands and see what they can find.

Woodland flora including: Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Greater Stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*), Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), Woodland Carr, Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris)*, nettles (*Urtica dioica*), Iris (*Iris sp.*), Bramble (*Rubus sp*).

5.8 Sefton Coast Nature Conservation Strategy

Article by Izzie Spall

The Sefton Coast Nature Conservation Strategy is being refreshed for the first time since 2007. With less than 30% of the Sefton Coast SSSI in favourable condition, and with growing pressures from climate change, invasive species, visitor impacts and coastal change, the update is an important opportunity to set out how we protect and care for one of the most important coastal landscapes in Europe. MEAS is leading the refresh, supported by the Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership, with funding from Natural England and Our Future Coast to continue developing this important Strategy.

Over the past year, we have spent time engaging with residents, volunteers, landowners, partner organisations and local schools to help shape the refreshed Strategy. Through talks, workshops, school sessions and an online survey, people have voiced how much the coast means to them, whether as a place for wildlife, wellbeing, family time or simply fresh air and open space. We also heard clear concerns about litter, dog disturbance, anti-social behaviour, recreational access and the effects of climate change and invasive species, all of which underline the importance of a joined-up approach to managing this special landscape.

To support this, work is underway to deploy a coast-wide project pipeline alongside a new interactive Sefton Coast Map. This tool will bring the whole picture of Sefton Coast into one place, showing what projects are happening where, what ideas are coming forward next, and where there are clear gaps in funding, specialist skills or volunteer support. By making this information public and accessible, the aim is to help partners coordinate more effectively while also opening the door for investors, community groups and volunteers to see where their contribution could make the biggest impact.

Next year, there will be final engagement activities on the draft Strategy which should then be published by Summer 2026.

5.9 Mersey Forest Willow Tit Project

Article by Kayleigh Joy,
The Mersey Forest

Support Willow Tit research in The Mersey Forest

Willow Tits have declined by 96% since the 1960s and are now one of the UK's fastest-disappearing birds. The Mersey Forest is supporting a PhD project led by Ben Secker at Manchester Metropolitan University to understand why and how we can help them recover.

The research is taking place in woodlands across the Mersey Forest and surrounding areas, focusing on nest-site competition and how young birds move through the landscape.

Colour ringing is a key part of the study. By marking birds with unique colour combinations, researchers can track their movements and learn what they need to survive. Volunteers can help by spotting and reporting colour-ringed Willow Tits using the free MerginMaps app. Every sighting provides valuable data to the project.

If you'd like to get involved, download the volunteer handbook and find out more at merseyforest.org.uk/our-work/phd-willowtits or email willowtits@merseyforest.org.uk.

Here is a link to the webpage:
PhD research on Willow Tits in the Mersey Forest | The Mersey Forest : The Mersey Forest

FROM EVERYONE AT MBB AND MEAS

HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

SEE YOU IN 2026