

BADCOG main Work Party report.

May 09 -Buckenham Woods – NE section and within W pit area of wood – continued removal of sycamore by either using the root pulling tool or cutting with bowsaw/loppers/chainsaw and then treated. Constructed a barrier in NE section and at top of steps to block off unwanted paths. Area around main gate, bike rack and benches scythed. Cut vegetation raked and cleared to fire sites/spoil heaps. Members 7.

May 30 – Jary's Meadow and Walsham Fen

Jary's Meadow – Main entrance gate area – East fire site and path network raked and cleared. SW section some bracken pulled by hand. Main gate area encroaching blackthorn and shrubs close to apple trees cut back. All cut vegetation cleared to fire sites and burnt.

Walsham Fen – Top and sides of boardwalk raked and cleared to spoil heaps. Some nettles scythed. Members 9.

Jun 13 – Buckenham Woods – Car parking area – cut back vegetation to improve visibility of the passing main road. Raked and cleared along path and around steps area that was cut on Monday 08 Jun. Around steps area and inside gravel pit many different sizes of sycamores were removed using either root pulling tools or bowsaws. Those cut with bowsaw were treated. Continued with laying of logs along edge of the newly surfaced path. All cut vegetation removed to fire site/spoil heap. Members 4.

Jun 27—Lingwood Churchyard—Raked and cleared the conservation area of the churchyard, along with others areas left during 'No mow May'. The 'green hay' was spread around Peter's Wood to try and improve the flora diversity in this local amenity. Members 8

Additional work carried out outside the normal work parties.

Apr 30 –Howes Meadow- Path both sides of stream from E end to bridge mown.

May 01/02/03/04\05\06\07 – Howes Meadow – Continued control of burning at fire sites.

May 23 – Jary's Meadow – Repaired damaged barbed wire fence by the JM/WF gate.

Jun 08 – Buckenham Woods. Area in and around steps – a half metre strip along edge of path to main gate and around 2 benches mown.

BADCOG WORK PARTY DATES.

Work parties start at 10.30am and finish at about 1pm.

[Check website for more details and for any changes/ cancellations.](#)

11th July—Blofield Churchyard

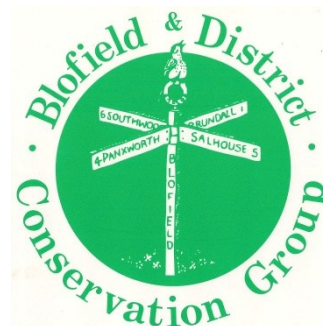
14th July—Green Gym at Blofield Churchyard

25th July—Hemblington Churchyard

8th August—Howe's Meadow

22nd August—Jary's Meadow

5th September—Walsham Fen



Orchid Counts 2026

BADCOG NEWS.

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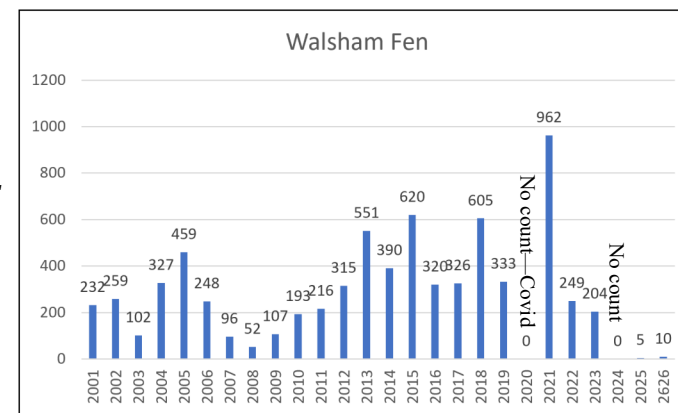


BADCOG has monitored orchid numbers at Howe's Meadow and Walsham Fen for many years, with records dating back to 1994 and 2001 respectively. Although the counting method has limitations, its consistency makes it a useful indicator of long-term orchid trends. Both sites support Southern Marsh and Common Spotted orchids, as well as some hybrids. The species are not counted separately but recorded together.

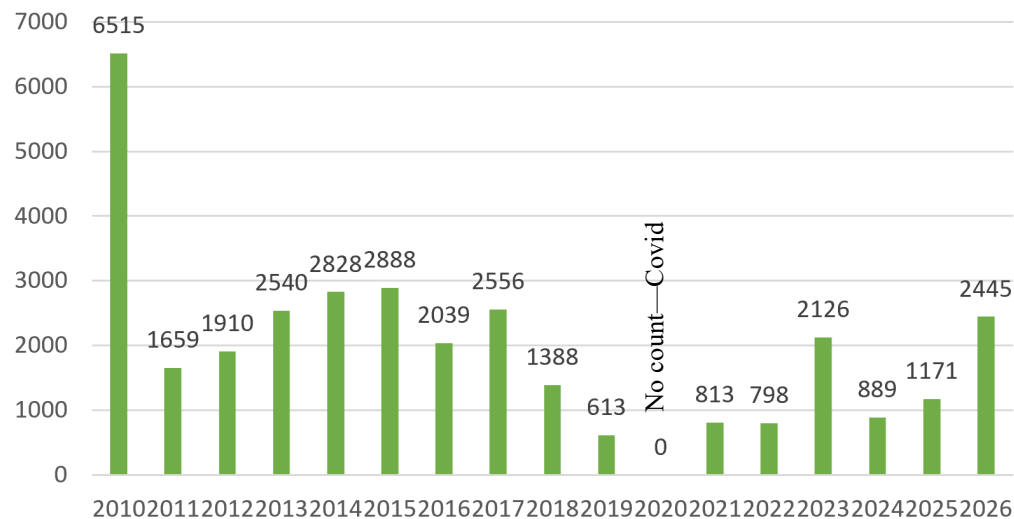
This year's counts took place at Howe's Meadow on 22 June and at Walsham Fen on 26 June, during a particularly warm evening.

At Howe's Meadow, around 90% of the site is surveyed, with most orchids found in the south-west section. This year's total was 2,445, including 2,302 in the south-west. The south-east section had only 86 orchids, while the whole northern side of the meadow had 57. See graph over the page. At Walsham Fen, two sections covering about 30% of the fen are counted, along with the boardwalk edges, where orchid numbers have previously been strong. More regularly cut areas, such as the boardwalk edges, appear to support higher numbers. Increased cutting would be beneficial, but current capacity does not allow for it. Recent counts at Walsham Fen have been very

disappointing, as shown in the chart. A recent visit by Sam Brown of the NWT found no clear reason for the decline, and current site management appears to be sound.



Howe's Meadow



Aerobatic skills include flying into the nest at great speed then braking. Eric Hosking talked of the difficulty of catching close up shots with his camera and instead used a photo electric beam. This caught the swallow's perfect streamlining - their legs and feet tucked under the stomach feathers reducing wind resistance.

The distinctive shape of 'hirundines' - swallows and martins - their bodies are long, narrow and streamlined while their wings are triangular enabling them to fly not only fast but also very slowly to twist and turn while chasing and catching their target. The swallow's tail acts as a rudder so it can apply drag or lift and change direction speedily in mid air.

An avian perpetual-motion machine, the barn swallow in Zambia is named *Nyankalema* - the bird that never gets tired.

Having arrived on our shores in early to mid-April we may see them in late August and through September gathering on telegraph wires and rooftops before beginning their long journey south.

Barbara Pilch

Poet's Corner

THE THRUSH NEST

Within a thick and spreading hawthorn bush,
That overhung a molehill large and round,
I heard from morn to morn a merry thrush
sing hymns to sunrise, and with joy I drank the sound.

And often an intruding guest,
I watched her secret toil from day to day.
How true she warped the moss to form a nest,
and modelled it with wood and clay.
And by and by, like heath bells gilt with dew,
There lay her shining eggs, as bright as flowers,
Ink-spotted over shells of greeny blue;
And there I witnessed in the sunny hours,
A brood of Nature's minstrels chirp and fly,
Glad as the sunshine and the laughing sky.

JOHN CLARE

Hazel dormice get a wild boost.

More than 40 rare hazel dormice have been released into ancient woodland in Leicestershire to boost efforts to bring the mammals back to the county.

At Bradgate Park Trust estate this reintroduction is part of ongoing efforts by the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) to save dormice - which have declined by more than 70 per cent nationally since 2000 from extinction.

Hazel dormice have suffered from the loss of old woodlands in the past century, the lack of management of those which are left and the loss and neglect of the hedgerows they use as homes and corridors though the landscape, conservationists said.

The charity said that the reintroduction in June 2026 follows the release of 21 hazel dormice into the same woodland on the estate last year, which created Leicestershire's only known population.



Scene from a window.

On recent holidays I have been enjoying close views of wildlife on the Isle of Arran; otters, porpoises, red squirrels, golden eagles and adders are all a delight and now we have close neighbours - a community of swallows. On view from my Scottish kitchen window is a nest built under the eaves of our bicycle shed. Other swallows along the lane behind this row of houses have chosen to build in porches and on any available ledges. "Our" swallows swoop in and out. They twitter at us when their routine is hampered by us encroaching on their territory. A sparrow landing anywhere nearby is mobbed by a swooping gang of local swallows persisting in dive bombing it until its ignominious departure. I have seen this behaviour against a blackbird and even a red squirrel which ventured too close.

Some sparrow facts gleaned from a delightful book by Stephen Moss. Their willingness to nest and forage close to people has made them a part of the fabric of farmyard and village life. Birds who live part of their lives alongside humans such as the house sparrow, barn owl and barn swallow are known as 'commensual'. Porches and outbuildings provide sheltered nesting places. Farmyards provide the dung of farm animals attracting an abundance of flying insects - (sites on Arran provide a host of midges!) A nest can be used for several successive years by birds returning from Africa to the same site. If building from scratch mud must be fetched involving many trips and then a lining created with grass, hair and feathers. In Germany one nest was recorded as having the longest single occupancy, over 48 years, by successive generations of the same family.

Swallows' song is expressive of a 'joie de vivre', exuberant twitterings, the French call it a *gazouillement* - the sound of a babbling brook. Eggs are incubated for between 13 and 16 days with no help from the male bird but once the chicks are hatched he takes full part in their feeding. A single brood needs to eat 150,000 insects before fledging some 18 - 23 days after hatching. That's 7,000 - 8,000 every day.

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Some of our most enigmatic plants.

The downside for plants growing in habitats fed by very pure water is the lack of nutrients available for growth, in particular nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. They have developed clever mechanisms for stealing nutrients or trapping insects, which are then digested for their essential nutrients. This is usually through modified leaves which trap insects and secrete enzymes to digest their prey, whilst others have evolved to have small sacs with trapdoors on their submerged roots.

The leaves of the **common butterwort** excrete a sticky fluid which attracts insects. Once they are trapped the leaves curl around their prey and digest them. The purple flowers appear from May to July. People once believed that rubbing the juices of the leaves into cow udders would protect against bad butter.

Marsh Lousewort, a hemiparasite, is related to yellow rattle which is found in old meadows. Although it has its own chlorophyll to generate energy, it steals nutrients and moisture by connecting its roots to the neighbouring plants, in particular sedges and rushes. It is sometimes known locally as red rattle.

Common bladderwort is a vigorous, rootless, tiny-leaved plant which traps minute prey by means of bladder-like traps. Some of its leaves float atop the water and some are submerged. Aquatic insects activate trigger hairs which suck the insect in and slam the door shut.

The **round-leaved sundew** is a strange and beautiful plant. Tiny and slender, hair-like tendrils on each reddish leaf are tipped with glistening droplets which attract insects. The 'dew' is very sticky, trapping the insect then the tendrils detect the prey and curl inwards to engulf it.

The **great sundew** is the largest and most spectacular of the three British sundews (round-leaved, oblong-leaved and great), this species was last recorded in the Redgrave area in Suffolk around 1960. While the likelihood of it re-appearing from buried seed is low, it would be a prime candidate for a future re-introduction.

Axolotls

A recent report of the finding of an axolotl in an English stream – presumably a discarded “pet” – prompted me to refresh my knowledge of these creatures remembered from A-level zoology days.

The axolotl is an amphibian of the salamander family (*Ambystoma mexicanum*). It is neotenic, reaching sexual maturity without undergoing metamorphosis. The adults remain fully aquatic with external gills. Essentially this makes it a reproducing tadpole.

The original habitat was a system of interconnected wetlands and lakes in the highlands of Mexico. Drainage, initiated by the Aztecs and continued to the twentieth century, greatly reduced this habitat and wild axolotls are facing extinction. Attempts to re-establish them in the wild have petered out, largely due to habitat degradation, water pollution and invasive fish. However, a large captive population of axolotls exists for research purposes particularly because of their ability to regenerate body parts including limbs, gills and parts of the eyes, heart and brain. They are also kept successfully in aquaria.

They become sexually mature at about two years with a life span of ten to fifteen years. They are about nine inches in length, have wide heads and lidless eyes. They have vestigial teeth and feed by suction. Their carnivorous diet consists of worms, molluscs, small fish, aquatic insects and crustacea. In common with other amphibians they have the protective ability to change their skin tone by varying the size of their melanophores.

For metamorphosis to occur the hormone thyroxine, produced by the thyroid gland, is required. Thyroid activity is determined by thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) from the pituitary gland. Axolotls cannot produce TSH. The essential ingredient in thyroxine is iodine and its importance in development is shared by all vertebrates. Axolotls have bypassed this. It may be that low levels of iodine in its niche environment has led to selection of neoteny as the preferred method of propagation.

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Other members of the axolotl genus have the ability at times to exhibit neoteny partially or wholly but unlike the axolotl itself cannot be induced to metamorphose by the injection of iodine or thyroxine. Oral iodine is ineffective.

If metamorphosis is induced the axolotl becomes land based, the gills and fins are resorbed. There is an increase in muscle tone, increased lung size, reduced skin permeability and the development of eyelids.

Regenerative ability is largely lost. The resulting adult resembles an adult plateau tiger salamander.

The above is necessarily a broad brush summary of this fascinating creature and its development.

David Pilch

Wildlife report over the border in Lincolnshire

A 2026 wildlife report by farmer Nicholas Watts at Vine House Farm in Deeping St Nicholas, Lincolnshire, reveals recovering bird populations and ongoing wetland conservation efforts.



Water & Marsh Birds: Sedge Warblers (left) and Reed Buntings (right) are seeing a strong increase in Deeping Fen. This success follows a conservation victory where the local drainage board agreed to only mow one side of their 2-mile-long drainage ditches per year.

Barn Owls: The local Barn Owl population is having a productive year, with nests yielding 4 to 5 young on average. This success has been driven by good weather that has supported healthy vole populations.



Butterflies: Populations rebounded from prior low counts, bolstered by wandering Peacocks that are successfully over-wintering and preparing to produce new caterpillars in 2026.

Wintering Wildfowl: The farm's wetland is seeing lower numbers than in previous years, with Wigeon populations dropping significantly.