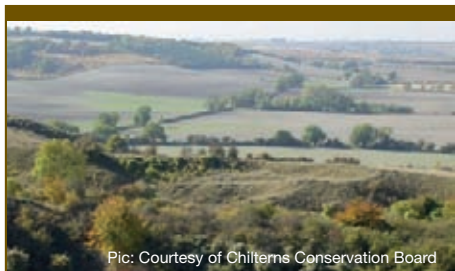




Spring 2010

Ecology Consultancy

# Briefing



Pic: Courtesy of Chilterns Conservation Board

## Princess Mary Hospital, Wendover

**Following our initial surveys of the Princess Mary Hospital at RAF Halton, The Ecology Consultancy has been contracted by Barratt and Bellway, to undertake further bat surveys in this ecologically important area close to Wendover, Bucks.**

RAF Halton is situated at the base of a north west facing chalk scarp of the Chiltern Hills, an area rich in special habitats and protected species.

Initially we identified a risk to both bats and reptiles. Reptiles were translocated off the site and a suite of detailed bat surveys was commissioned. We discovered roosts for pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats, and subsequently recommended the building of two purpose designed bat barns and the installation of bat roosting boxes to be incorporated into the garages and the walls of the new houses. Before any of this work could proceed a European Protected Species licence had to be sought from Natural England, necessitating a great deal of careful planning and design. We are currently working with Barratt and Bellway on a new area of the site that is also important for bats and where further bat mitigation and a new EPS licence will be required.

## inside...

**London office is moving to spacious central location this Spring see p.4**

**Great Crested Newts - keep within the law! see p.4**

## Residential housing rides the recession

**In the UK economy's worst downturn for many years, under the Government's Building Britain's Future plan, £100M was announced in the last budget to fund local authority new build.**

Further funding has been announced with over 50 allocations having been made, allowing councils to deliver over 22,000 homes, to be built on their own land, to new environmental standards.

In addition, Kickstart, a Government scheme aimed at currently stalled sites, and the new public land initiative, have resulted in a flurry of applications from builders, notably Persimmon, Berkeley and BDW Trading (Barratt). New home orders to Taylor Wimpey rose by 28% this winter. The deadline for building projects to begin is March 31.

The Ecology Consultancy has a track record of working with residential property developers to ensure that the natural environment is protected and enhanced, and that the development process proceeds without any unforeseen problems arising. All new applications must comply with BREEAM environmental standards (see [www.breeam.org](http://www.breeam.org)).

## Eco-towns to be given green light

**In July last year, Housing Minister, John Healey, announced the publication of the Planning Policy Statement: Eco-towns, which claimed to set out the highest standards yet for green living (see [www.communities.gov.uk/.../planningandbuilding/pps-ecotowns](http://www.communities.gov.uk/.../planningandbuilding/pps-ecotowns)).**

Eco-towns will be new towns of a minimum of 5,000 homes, designed to meet the highest standards of sustainability, including low and zero carbon technologies and good public transport. By December last year, the Minister had received expressions of interest from a number of authorities wishing to conduct feasibility studies in their own area. Extra funding will be available to build early-stage demonstrator projects at the sites chosen. 14 locations have so far been included in the first wave. ([www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/ecotowns](http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/ecotowns))

The Ecology Consultancy helps to factor the natural environment into schemes for low-carbon housing; trees and shrubs absorb carbon dioxide and natural habitats are better able to cope with threats such as flooding. We have been part of the Design Team for an exciting sustainable urban extension project at Tilehurst in Berkshire, with Blue Living, carrying out wildlife surveys, and feeding ideas and information into the design process .....see p.4

"...designed to meet the highest standards of sustainability, including low and zero carbon technologies and good public transport."



Pic: Courtesy of Communities and Local Government



## Wetlands in focus

### Sussex idyll

The Brede Valley is a stretch of beautiful Sussex countryside near Rye. Romney and Walland marshes extend westwards past Winchelsea to create a wonderful area, rich in wildlife, with many footpaths and narrow winding lanes. No wonder The Ecology Consultancy staff were keen to offer their time to work with The Friends of Brede Valley!

In late summer last year our team of 20 volunteer ecologists undertook the first comprehensive habitat mapping of the valley. Local landowners provided access and camping accommodation in an idyllic location. The team covered the marshes below the 5m contour, known as the Brede Level, which had been formed by complex hydrological processes resulting in an exceptional diversity of aquatic plants and animals.



Over three days The Ecology Consultancy team looked for signs of protected species including water voles, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates and birds. The tall fen habitats were found to contain several groups of flies including the snail-killing fly (*Sciomyzidae*). In the central areas the main interest was the ditches and their water beetles. Samples are being identified and invertebrate ecologist Graham Hopkins has high hopes of interesting discoveries.

The Brede Valley supports many plant and animal species in varying abundance: some species and habitats are locally and nationally rare, contributing to its designation as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), including rootless duckweed *Wolffia arrhiza*, the UK's smallest flowering plant and a local specialty.

The Ecology Consultancy team will revisit the area in 2010 to extend the mapping to as much of the valley as possible. Consultation with interested parties will help guide the process. Important wildlife features will be highlighted with the general aim being to provide guidance to landowners as to where nature conservation benefit can best be achieved.

For more information on the area see <http://www.bredevalley.info> and [www.rxwildlife.org.uk](http://www.rxwildlife.org.uk)

## A Norfolk pondscape

Our Norfolk office has entered into a contract to restore five large ponds on a 360ha organic farm run by Peter, Lord Melchett, policy director of the Soil Association, the UK's organic food and farming organisation.

“As the ponds become re-established, they will attract wildlife such as invertebrates, frogs, toads, and maybe newts...”



Pic: Courtesy of Mike Jones

The ponds, varying in size from 10m<sup>2</sup> to 330m<sup>2</sup>, were mainly constructed 40-50 years ago to provide water for wildlife. One, used for watering farm animals, may date back to before enclosure in the 1780s. Over the years the ponds have fallen into disrepair, some with cracked linings and others becoming silted up through run-off. In time they would dry out and disappear completely.

Peter Melchett contacted The Ecology Consultancy after being awarded special project funding from English Nature, which administers habitat enhancement grants for DEFRA. Led by our ecologist, Mike Jones, we conducted surveys last summer and the main restoration works were carried out this winter, working with the Fen Ditching Company ([www.fenditching.co.uk](http://www.fenditching.co.uk)). Work involved relining the ponds with bentonite, a natural clay that forms a strong seal on wetting. Some of the ponds

were already attracting wildfowl even before works were completed!

In Spring 2010 we will follow up the restoration by seeding the banks with a wildflower mix and adding native wetland plug planting along the margins. The Ecology Consultancy will return to the ponds each spring for the next three years to monitor colonising species and assess the efficacy of the restoration process.

Peter Melchett said, “The purpose of the project is to ensure the ponds hold water permanently and that there is an increase year on year in biodiversity. As the ponds become re-established, they will attract wildlife such as invertebrates, frogs, toads, and maybe newts, and they will help support the endangered farmland birds that our organic farming suits so well. I really was delighted with the way The Ecology Consultancy worked on the proposal, and recommended Fen Ditching, who did a great job.”



Great Crested Newts - keep within the law! see p.4



# Species in the spotlight: Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

by Dusty Gedge

**The black redstart, a bird which favours urban areas, is a protected species in the UK. Such commensalism with humans is unique for a rare breeding bird, but little research has been done on the ecology of this attractive creature, which in the UK is at the north-western edge of its European range.**

The black redstart was first reported to have bred in London at the Wembley Exhibition Centre in 1926 and since then its population has fluctuated, primarily in response to man's activities within the urban fabric. Its two principal breeding areas are Greater London, and Birmingham and the Black Country. A few pairs breed in other cities such as Nottingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Ipswich, and at cliff sites and power stations along the south coast between Suffolk and Dorset.

During and after the Second World War, the bombsites of the City provided ideal habitat for the black redstart: large areas of sparsely vegetated land between the shells of buildings reflected its continental optimum habitat on the scree slopes of the Alps. In 1964 the population around Cheapside in London was in the region of 16 pairs, but the regeneration of the Barbican caused the population to crash. Now black redstarts are only occasionally recorded in the City as their distribution has gradually moved eastwards along the Thames.

The Ecology Consultancy can make recommendations to developers which will mitigate the potential loss of habitat for this special bird. Key elements in mitigation



involve attempting to replicate the black redstart's natural habitat including areas of sparse 'wasteland' vegetation and stony ground which are necessary for foraging. Many pockets of brownfield land within London and Birmingham provide this habitat

requirement, along with vertical features such as buildings, gantries, flood defence structures and gasometers. Such structures correlate to the gorges and cliff faces of the birds' natural habitat in continental Europe, and provide high singing posts. They prefer a variety of ledges or holes which are ideal for nesting.

The black redstart is protected under Schedule 1 Wildlife and Countryside Act 1982 (as amended) and there is a requirement to provide mitigation where development impacts on known breeding areas. Over the last 13 years developers in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Reading have been encouraged to use green roofs designed specifically for the bird and the invertebrates on which it relies. Our sister consultancy – the Green Roof Consultancy [www.greenroofconsultancy.com] are the leading experts in this field, having designed over 200 projects, including the Laban Dance Centre, Barclays HQ and the Komodo Dragon House, London Zoo. The roofs form complex habitat systems that include wildflowers, as well as other features that are important for both black redstarts and invertebrates.

Dusty Gedge is co-ordinator of the London black redstart action plan and Director of Livingroofs.org. He is currently President of the European Federation of Green Roof Associations and a founder with The Ecology Consultancy of the Green Roof Consultancy.

## Ecobuild 2010 2-4 March Earls Court, London



**Ecobuild is the biggest event in the calendar for sustainable design, construction and the built environment. Exciting new events this year include the launch of the Eco Modular Living Ltd. three-bedroom home for the affordable housing sector.**

Bill Dunster's RuralZED, which specialises in zero carbon homes, will offer a 'design while you wait' planning service. Social housing providers and landowners will be able to produce a business plan for their plot.

The Ecology Consultancy will be there to discuss projects we have been involved in and your requirements for wildlife surveys and design input. We can help you meet new exacting environmental standards. Come and see us on the Ecobuild Biodiversity Pavilion in March!

## CIVILS 2009

The Ecology Consultancy stand at last year's CIVILS exhibition at Earl's Court was a hive of activity. Staff engaged new contacts in conversation and handed out our essential year-planner of species-critical points in the wildlife calendar.

Pic: Courtesy of CEEQUAL



## WORKING WITH WILDLIFE:

### A Resource Pack for the Construction Industry

**The new, revised CIRIA/Ecology Consultancy wildlife guide is coming out soon!**

This celebrated and indispensable manual includes easy-to-use sections on habitats, species and excellent advice on good practice. This is a must-have desktop companion for those encountering wildlife on development sites, including civil engineers, construction workers, architects and developers, and gives up-to-date information on the legal aspects of caring for wildlife in the built environment. A CD accompanying the pack will contain site-based species toolbox talks, and will also be downloadable from both CIRIA and The Ecology Consultancy websites.

**If you would like to order an advance copy, please contact Philip Charles at CIRIA. philip.charles@ciria.org**



## Norfolk networking

In January 2010 the Norwich office held an event for our valued clients within the Norfolk area. Despite the adverse weather conditions, we were delighted that many people joined us for drinks, nibbles and a demonstration of our bat detector range and slide show illustrating the wildlife we have encountered over the years. The evening gave clients the opportunity to ask questions and discuss all aspects of our work.

Feedback from our clients was encouraging; they appreciated our good communication throughout the life of a project and the good value services we provide.

Due to the success of this event we plan to do the same next year though this time we'll wait until the spring so we can avoid bad weather, have a barbecue and listen to bats foraging over the lake!



**New office (London)**  
STUDIOS 5 AND 6,  
6-8 COLE STREET  
LONDON SE1 4YH

**FROM  
APRIL**

## Pincents Hill, Tilehurst - a sustainable urban extension

The Ecology Consultancy has been involved with this high quality, mixed-use development project from the outset. The 21ha site will incorporate courtyard living and shared green areas, and will include nearly 750 homes, built to the highest environmental standards. At the masterplan stage we helped to identify important habitats and species. Following a comprehensive survey, and assessment, our ecology chapter formed an important part of the Environmental Statement which will be fundamental to the planning deliberation.

With the aim of bringing about a net gain in the biodiversity value of the site, we have recommended planting a woodland corridor to increase connectivity to the existing off-site and retained wildlife areas including ancient woodland. This will enable species, such as dormice, bats and badgers, to move safely around and through the site. The proposals also include the incorporation of wildlife ponds, nut & fruit orchards, wildflower meadows, new hedges, more trees, and log piles for stag beetles. Pre-construction surveys and mitigation will be undertaken and biodiversity monitoring put in place.



Pic: Courtesy of Blue Living

## Build East Sussex

Our Lewes team attended 'Build East Sussex' in January. A new Government-led initiative, set up by East Sussex County Council and Hove City Council, 'Build East Sussex' is a network of locally-based businesses, including construction companies, and business support organisations. Similar events are to be held at various locations around the country.

Naomi Forbes, The Ecology Consultancy ecologist, described the event as, "a valuable introduction for us which will enhance our relationship with companies working in the region, giving us a heads-up on sustainability projects in which The Ecology Consultancy can play a part".



## Great Crested Newts alert!

Without a development licence it is illegal to kill, injure or disturb great crested newts, or to damage, destroy or obstruct their habitat. Pond surveys should be conducted between mid March and mid June, and terrestrial surveys in suitable weather conditions from March to October. These need to be undertaken before development work begins and in order to obtain the relevant licence for essential mitigation measures to be put in place. Most lowland regions in the UK are potential great crested newt sites. If you suspect that great crested newts may be an issue for any projects you have in mind, please contact us as soon as possible as the ideal time for newt surveys is rapidly approaching.

## Contact us

### London

Studios 5 and 6,  
6-8 Cole Street,  
London SE1 4YH  
t: 020 7326 0007

### Lewes

The Old Granary,  
Upper Stoneham, Lewes,  
East Sussex, BN8 5RH  
t: 01273 471369

### Norwich

Unit 7, Lodge Farm Barns  
New Road, Bawburgh  
Norwich NR9 3LZ  
t: 01603 271811



# Ecology Consultancy

You have received this Briefing as a valued contact and we hope you have found it informative. If you have any comments on it we would love to hear from you at any one of our offices. If you would prefer not to receive any more Briefings, or information on our services, please write to Jane Kendall, Ecology Consultancy, Studios 5 and 6, 6-8 Cole Street, London SE1 4YH or email [enquiries@ecologyconsultancy.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@ecologyconsultancy.co.uk).