

Spring Newsletter

Photo competition winners

A huge thank you to everyone who submitted their incredible images for our 2025 competition. We received almost 100 photos! Thank you for celebrating the beauty, history and shared spaces of Box Moor with us.

Photo: Sarah Coldwell

We narrowed down the entries to 12 finalists, which were then put to the public vote via social media, to find a first, second and third place.

The winning image was a beautiful, atmospheric and misty shot taken by Sarah Coldwell at Overbourne, Westbrook Hay. A close second was a stunning capture by Daren Cole of a kingfisher taking flight, fish in beak. Third place went to Anna Blackshaw for her spectacular photo of a rainbow arching over Hardings Moor. An exhibition of all twelve final images will be held at the Old Barn, Westbrook Hay, during the summer months.

We're now pleased to announce the theme for this year's competition: **"Where Nature, Heritage and Community Meet"**. Maybe you like to photograph landscapes? We have almost 500 acres of woods, meadows, hills and valleys. Enjoy taking action shots? The Trust hosts two cricket clubs and a rugby club. If wildlife and nature is your preferred subject matter, there is a rich variety of flora and fauna to be found in every corner of the estate. We'd love to see all the seasons of the year represented.

All photographs must have been taken of, or from, Box Moor Trust land. The closing date is 30th November 2026. Entry is free and competitors may submit up to 10 images. Photos must be in jpg format, minimum resolution 300ppi (pixels per inch) in order to reproduce well in print. See website for further details and entry form (look under 'News and Events').

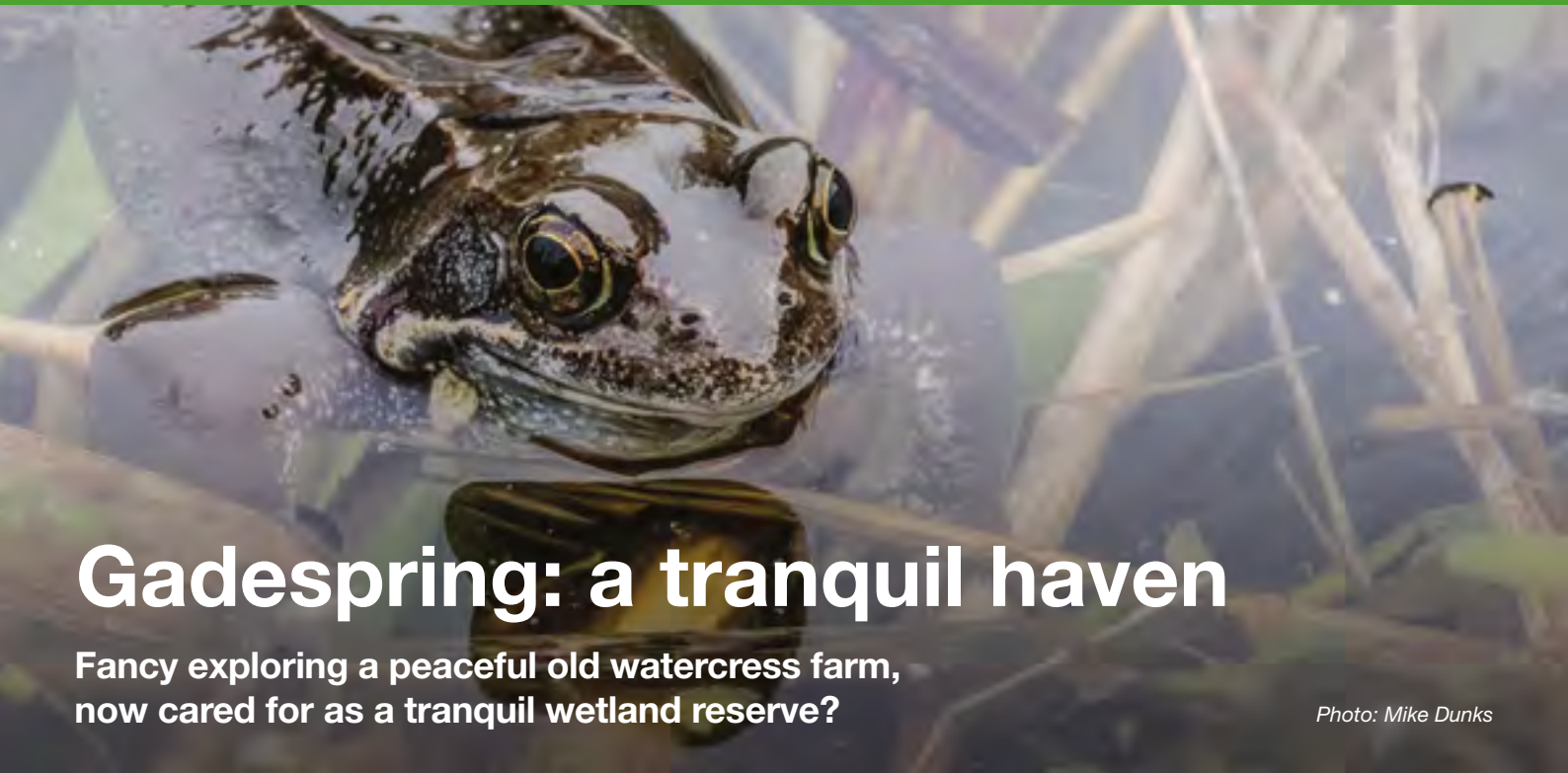


Photo: Daren Cole



Photo: Anna Blackshaw





Gadespring: a tranquil haven

Fancy exploring a peaceful old watercress farm, now cared for as a tranquil wetland reserve?

Photo: Mike Dunks

It's a gentle place where the sounds of running water and birdsong take over from the rush of everyday life. If you're looking for a quiet break surrounded by nature and history, this could be the perfect little escape.

The Trust opens this fascinating site every Thursday from 10am to noon and on the last Sunday of each month between 11am and 2pm. These events are run on behalf of the Trust by some of our knowledgeable volunteers, who will show you around and explain

more about how Gadespring is managed. Learn about the history of how watercress was farmed here for many years until 1991.

The wildlife at Gadespring is typical of a chalk stream habitat, and you may see kingfishers, little egrets and herons. If you are really lucky, you might even catch a glimpse of a water vole or a shy water rail. If you park at the HH (Camelot) RUFC car park, a short stroll down Old Fishery Lane will lead you to Gadespring on the right-hand side, just before the canal bridge

Tern raft gets a makeover

Our freshly refurbished and upgraded tern raft is now back on the water at Pixies Mere, looking better than ever and ready to welcome its returning visitors. Common terns arrive to breed in the UK in the summer from their wintering grounds around the coast of Spain and Africa's western seaboard. Terns are famed for travelling some of the longest migration distances of any birds.



Photo: Elaine Rushton

Westbrook Hay walk routes and maps

Regular visitors to Westbrook Hay will know that we've been working hard to improve the footpaths and parking over the last months. There are now four new walk routes of varying lengths to cater for all abilities. Barnfield Loop, Skylark Path, Galloway Walk and Westbrook Boundary Trail are all colour coded and waymarked for ease of navigation. This map, showing all four routes, is now on the website and appears on noticeboards at Westbrook Hay access points.





We met the cows

After spending the winter months staying warm and cosy in the livestock barns at Howes Retreat, our Belted Galloways are always happy to get out onto the pastures in spring.

By the time you read this, they may well be back grazing on the moors – always a welcome and familiar sight! Back in February, we were pleased to host another 'Meet the Cows' event, where members of the public were able to come and see the cattle up close and learn more about their care and management, and their vital role as conservation grazers for the Trust. It was lovely to meet so many of our beneficiaries enjoying their visit to the farm.



Photos: Elaine Rushton



Photo: Will Atkins

Rare fungi discovery

We're thrilled to announce that one of Britain's rarest fungi - the Valted Earthstar (*Geastrum britannicum*) - was spotted right here on Box Moor Trust land in January.

This fungus was discovered for the first time in 2015. Originally thought to be unique to Britain (hence the second part of its botanical name), it has now been recorded in a few parts of Europe. However, it is still extremely rare and a fantastic find for our county.

These unusual fungi typically grow beneath yew trees, and we were lucky enough to have two fruiting bodies at the base of a large yew. Who knows... there may be more hidden across the Estate. The best time to find them is between August and February, so keep your eyes peeled from late summer onwards. If you think you've spotted a Valted Earthstar, we'd love to hear from you.

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Spring lambs 2026



Photo: Jo Rough



Photo: Elaine Rushton

In March, we were delighted to welcome around 800 visitors to our lambing sheds for our annual lambing event.

Guests had the chance to see the newest members of our flock up close, both in the nursery pens and out in the paddock, where the young lambs were beginning to explore their surroundings. It was a memorable experience for all, and some visitors were especially fortunate to witness a ewe giving birth to twin lambs - a truly remarkable moment that captured the magic of the season.



Trust Chair Patrick Schneiders with Dacorum Mayor, Councillor Catherine McArey

Photo: Jo Rough

Egg-cellent news!

As part of our ongoing programme of wildlife monitoring across the estate, the Box Moor Trust is delighted to share the exciting news that a breeding pair of barn owls has once again taken up residence in one of our owl boxes. Recent footage from our wildlife cameras shows that the female has already laid four eggs, marking a promising start to the breeding season. Careful and regular monitoring of wildlife across the estate plays a vital role in helping us manage the landscape sensitively, ensuring it continues to support a rich diversity of species for years to come.



Duke of Edinburgh volunteers

A huge 'thank you' to our fantastic young volunteers working towards their Duke of Edinburgh awards.

Their hard work and enthusiasm really shone through as they helped erect a brand-new fence at Gadespring. Not only does it look brilliant, but it will also give some privacy to our resident kingfishers as they head into the breeding season. Wonderful effort all round.

If you are interested in DoE volunteering, please contact us at environment@boxmoortrust.org.uk

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