

Autumn Newsletter

Meet the cows

Wondering where our Belties disappear to each winter?

Join us in November for Meet the Cows at the Box Moor Trust, a special ticket-only event offering the chance to visit our friendly Belted Galloway cattle in their winter home at the cattle barns at Howes Retreat. Get up close to these iconic animals and discover why they are affectionately known as our "living lawnmowers". Learn about the important role they play in grazing and managing the Trust's pastureland, while our knowledgeable Rangers share fascinating facts and answer any questions you may have.

As well as meeting the cows, visitors can enjoy refreshments, children's activities and the opportunity to find out more about the work of the Box Moor Trust. Our pop-up Box Moor Trust shop will also be open, with the chance to take home your very own toy Beltie and browse a range of gifts and stocking fillers, perfect for Christmas.



7th November 2026

Howe's Retreat, Felden Lane, Hemel Hempstead, HP3 0BY

Photo: Ashley Farrell

This is a ticket-only event, with three timed sessions available throughout the day.

We look forward to welcoming you for a unique behind-the-scenes experience with some of the Trust's most popular residents.



This QR code will take you direct to the booking page



Festival goes with a swing!



Photos: Elaine Rushton

Our annual festival, held over the weekend of 19th and 20th September, was a resounding success, attracting visitors of all ages for two days of entertainment, activities and community spirit.

Blessed with glorious weather, particularly on Sunday, we were delighted to see so many people turn out to support the event and enjoy everything on offer.

There was something for everyone, from live music and dance performances to circus and pottery workshops, children's activities, have-a-go archery, and a wide variety of craft and charity stalls. Visitors were even treated to a special appearance by Terry the T-Rex, who proved a popular attraction! The festival was officially opened by the Mayor of Dacorum, Councillor Garrick Stevens, and we were delighted to welcome him to the event. It was wonderful to meet and chat with so many of our beneficiaries and supporters, and to have the opportunity to share the latest news about the Trust and the land in our care.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Barry and Abi Collins and the team at Boxmoor Playhouse for coordinating the performances, and to Matt Butterworth for providing the performance tent and PA equipment. Our gratitude also goes to Michele Amiss and the fantastic Army Cadets, whose cheerful willingness to help wherever needed was invaluable. Thank you, too, to all the stallholders who generously donated raffle prizes and, last but certainly not least, to the performers, clubs, societies and volunteers who gave their time so freely to make the event such a success.

Quite simply, we could not have done it without you. We look forward to welcoming everyone back and doing it all again next year.



Celebrating photography at Box Moor Trust

In July, the winners of the 2025 Photography Competition were invited to a special reception at the Old Barn, Westbrook Hay, to celebrate the launch of an exhibition showcasing their award-winning images.

The photographs have been enlarged, professionally printed, and mounted on the walls of the outdoor shelter area at the Old Barn. Capturing a diverse range of scenes and perspectives from across the Trust estate, the display looks stunning and is well worth a visit. Next time you are enjoying a walk in the area, be sure to take a look. We are confident you will be impressed.

Entries for the 2026 Photography Competition are still open until 30th November 2026, so there's still time to get involved. This year's theme, "Where Nature, Heritage and Community Meet", offers plenty of inspiration, from landscapes and wildlife to sporting action across the Trust's 500-acre estate. Photographs must be taken on Box Moor Trust land. Entry is free, competitors may submit up to 10 images, and cash prizes are available for the winners. We would love to see photographs from all seasons represented.

New for this year is a Junior Category for under-18s. There is no set theme for junior entries, provided the photographs are taken on Trust land. Prizes will be awarded for first, second and third place. Visit the website for full details and entry information.



Photo: Elaine Rushton



Photo: L&L Wildlife Monitoring

More good news from our barn owls

This year, we've recorded a second brood with three healthy chicks. Seeing breeding success like this is a great indicator that the surrounding fields are being managed in a way that supports both owls and the wildlife they depend on. The data we collect helps guide future management decisions, ensuring we continue to create and maintain thriving habitats for nature.

Wild Pond Flourishing

In 2023, we completed a full refurbishment of the large pond on Preston Hill at Westbrook Hay. Originally created in 1997 to introduce a wetland habitat into an otherwise dry landscape, the pond was drained, re-lined and its margins replanted with species suited to wetland conditions.

The pond is fed by groundwater, which is pumped from a borehole. Three years later, the transformation has been remarkable. The vegetation has flourished and become well established within the surrounding landscape, while the pond now supports a diverse range of wildlife, including newts, dragonflies and damselflies.

A footpath leads from the edge of Hay Wood to a viewing point overlooking the pond, where visitors can watch wildlife discreetly from behind a screen. Recently, local RSPB member Ian Bambrough was fortunate enough to observe and photograph some notable visitors, including Lesser Whitethroats and Spotted Flycatchers (pictured), taking advantage of the sheltered scrub habitat beside the pond. At this time of year, many young birds are beginning to disperse, often remaining with their parents for a short period while they learn essential foraging skills. As they prepare for their southward migration, it is rewarding to know that our pond, rich in newly emerging invertebrates, has provided a valuable oasis and feeding stop on their journey.

Photo: Ian Bambrough

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Gadespring Nature Reserve

Old Fishery Lane, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 2BN
Park at Camelot Rugby Club in Chaulden Lane

Although, due to the nature of the site, it is not practical for this former watercress farm to be accessible at all times, it is open to visit on regular occasions each month:

Weekly Thursday Open Mornings 10am-12 noon

Join our friendly volunteers every Thursday morning and discover this beautiful wetland nature reserve as it continues to flourish. Wander the paths, enjoy the peaceful surroundings, spot wildlife from the bird hide and learn more about the exciting restoration of this unique habitat.

Monthly Sunday Open Days 11am-2pm

Take a walk through this tranquil micro nature reserve, meet the volunteers who work hard to manage the site, learn about its history as a working watercress farm and take some time to observe the wildlife from the bird hide.



Photo: Adam Brennan



Photo: Adam Brennan



Photo: Graham Denney

A Special Discovery

Visitors to our mothing session at Gadespring Nature Reserve in August were treated to a wonderful surprise when a beautiful Latticed Heath moth made an appearance.

While field guides describe this species as common, it is actually in decline and is now only rarely encountered. Many of the children attending the event were fortunate enough to see this striking moth up close, making the discovery even more memorable. The caterpillars of the Latticed Heath depend on clover species for food, highlighting the importance of maintaining wildflower-rich habitats that support a wide range of wildlife. Thank you to everyone who joined us for this fascinating morning of discovery and learning. Nature always has a few surprises in store!



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