

NATURE RECOVERY GROUP – ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIONS

The following provides a summary of actions that have been adopted by the Cottenham Nature Recovery Group and other actions suggested for inclusion. The list is not exhaustive and we seek comment: Are there other actions that we should consider or actions to reject?

TARGETED ACTIONS

1. SILVER-WASHED FRITILLARY (RED LIST),

Introduction

The Silver Washed (SWF) is on the National Red List although the SWF is categorised at low risk. It has been sighted in the area particularly to the south of the village and occasionally along Long Drove. The SWF larvae feed exclusively on Dog Violet.

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/silver-washed-fritillary>

Actions:

- Education and outreach through a local newsletter article.
- Request Dog Violets (common as weeds in many Cottenham gardens) from residents
- Plant in Fen Reeves and other mature woods
- Plant adjacent to mature oak trees in All Saints church yard
- Encourage residents to plant adjacent to woodland
- Protect from muntjac with chicken-wire where appropriate
- Create and maintain woodland glades
- Eggs and larvae are available from commercial sources and if considered appropriate these could be used for adding genetic diversity to local butterfly populations.

Results Expected:

Establishment of Silver-Washed fritillary and other woodland insect species. Potentially introduce Dark Green Fritillary into area.

Timetable:

Plant autumn 2025/2026/2027 and ongoing

2. MOTHS, BATS AND WHITE ADMIRAL (RED LIST, HIGH PRIORITY).

The larvae of the White Admiral butterflies feed exclusively on honeysuckle in part shaded woodland. This is a stretch target but could be achieved. *Lonicera periclymenum* (common honeysuckle) has high environmental value as a native wildlife plant, providing rich nectar for long-tongued bees, butterflies, and night-scented moths (Elephant Hawkmoth, Honeysuckle Moth, Twenty-Plume moth), autumn berries for birds, and dense structural cover for nesting. While one White Admiral was recorded in the village in 2026 this was thought to be due to high winds.

<https://www.bats.org.uk/>

Actions:

- Take cuttings of *Lonicera periclymenum* and establish in trays
- Replant in Fen Reeves Wood with recycled tree-guard protection
- Manage glades while maintain bramble and nettle populations in other areas.

Results Expected:

Possibility of establishing the White Admiral butterfly but regardless of this success, provision of a woodland source of pollen and nectar at a time of year when not available from the trees,

Timetable:

Take cuttings late spring 2026 and 2027

Plant autumn 2026 and 2027 and ongoing

3. BRASSY LONGHORN (NATIONALLY SCARCE), MARSH FRITILLARY (RED LIST HIGH PRIORITY, MARSH CARPET MOTH, (RED LIST) FOUR-SPOTTED MOTH

The Brassy Longhorn moth is present in the area but at low numbers. The Marsh Fritillary butterfly is no longer found in the region and the target is aspirational. Other moths to target are the Four-spotted moth (requires Convolvulus and short grass or bare earth in May) or Marsh Carpet moth (this requires Meadow Rue).

Actions:

- Collect scabious seed from wild plants (ideally devils bit scabious although other scabious are also useful). In southern Europe the butterfly survives on dryer scrubland and this might prove a valuable adaptation to climate change.
- Other plants such as Meadow Rue to be Established in trays.
- Plant in managed green spaces and verges.
- Continue to encourage mowing regimes that avoid cutting when the scabious is flowering or setting seed.
- Consider reintroduction via transfer of larvae or eggs if appropriate.

Results Expected:

Increase in Brassy Longhorn and other species feeding specifically on scabious and those insects that would benefit from late season pollen and nectar sources.

Timetable:

Collect seed July and August 2026 for planting in trays

Plant in suitable sites once established in autumn 2026, spring 2027 and autumn 2027

4. HOUSE MARTINS (RED LIST – CONSERVATION CONCERN)

The House Martin was common in Cottenham until relatively recently. However, nests have been destroyed, and new houses provide less grip for creating clay nests. UK populations have declined by over 30% over the last 10 years ('Songbird Survival') and numbers are now lower than for Swallows. It is at high risk of loss.

Actions:

- Promote ponds in Old Rec (Broad Lane) as source of wet clay and insects
- Broaden plant species to maintain insect populations at the old rec
- Maintain "bug hotel" at Old Rec.
- Encourage house holders to maintain wet clay sources
- Encourage use of nesting "cups"
- Increase awareness of <https://housemartinconservation.com/conservation>

Results Expected:

Re-establish House Martins as a common species in Cottenham as they were 30 years ago. House Martins are now considered at risk nationally

Timetable:

From spring 2027

5. BARN OWLS (GREEN LIST – LEAST CONCERN BUT DECLINING) TREE AND HOUSE SPARROWS (RED LIST) AND OTHER BIRD SPECIES

While Barn Owls are not subject to major threat, numbers are declining rapidly largely due to lack of nesting sites. Other species such as Tree and House Sparrows (Red List) are also in decline.

<https://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/>

<https://www.housesparrowscience.com/>

<https://www.gwct.org.uk/blogs/news/2026/march/world-sparrow-day-how-to-support-tree-sparrows-at-home/>

Actions:

- Explore funding through the Small Nature Grant
- Construct and erect one new owl box at Fen Reeves Wood.
- Engage with Scouts to organise additional bird boxes to an agreed design in Fen Reeves and WARG field
- Promote installation of nest boxes by the community
- Promote supplementary feeding at critical times (for sparrows)
- Planting wildflower plots such as introduced into the Village Green and the Old Rec.
- Aim to leave at least some grassland uncut to provide a source of small seed.
- Encourage management of hedges to form suitable nesting sites (such as achieved on the perimeter of The Old Rec)

Results Expected:

Stabilisation of bird populations locally

Timetable:

Pre 2024/2025/2026/2027 and ongoing

6. COMMON AND GREAT CRESTED NEWTS (BOTH ARE PROTECTED SPECIES)

There is a particularly large population of both Common and Great Crested newts in the Tenison Manor moat. This site has been under management for several years. Common newts (i.e. smooth or palmate newts) have limited protection in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Great Crested newts are a European protected species and require a licence to disturb or capture them. This project is highly dependent on retaining the current licenced newt handler.

<https://www.arc-trust.org/newt-conservation-partnership>

Actions:

- Remove excessive reed growth annually
- Manage excess water vegetation using a straw sponge
- Monitor for invasive weeds such as *Crassula helmsii* to ensure removal before it is established.
- Newt ladders from drains

- Hold an annual open evening to show the newt population

Results Expected:

Maintenance of newt population

Timetable:

From 2023 and ongoing

7. TURTLE DOVE (RED LIST)

Turtle Doves are occasionally found in Cottenham and there is already a (so far unsuccessful) site, targeting suitable habitat. Recovery requires dense scrub for nesting, low-density small seed plants and water.
<https://www.operationturtledove.org/>

Actions:

- Maintain existing site
- Improve access to ponds including cutting encroaching overgrowth on the edge of Fen Reeves wood
- Explore planting of suitable seed plants on the margin of the lode to provide feed
- Look for other suitable sites to modify (Les King Wood?)

Results Expected:

Sustain at least one population of Turtle Doves in the village.

Timetable:

2024/2025/2026/2027

8. HEDGEHOG (RED LIST - NATIONALLY IN DECLINE)

Hedgehogs recovery is largely a garden-based project supported by the larger habitat interventions.

<https://mammal.org.uk/british-mammals/european-hedgehog>

<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/>

Actions:

Promote to interested parties:

- Maintain hedges such as at Old Rec and Tenson manor
- Maintain diverse grass such as found at Old Rec and Tenison Manor Moat
- Encourage construction of compost heaps, log piles and leaf piles
- Ponds to supply water
- Erect hedgehog nests
- Provision of feed (worms, beetles slugs, caterpillars, etc) from tussocky grass and eggs from ground nesting birds
- Garden linkage with creation of hedgehog holes.
- Local outreach and education about the issue – what can be done to help hedgehogs (improving access to gardens) and provision of information about hedgehog hospitals.

Results Expected:

Retain hedgehog population

Timetable:

From 2027 and ongoing

9. SWIFTS (RED LIST – CONSERVATION CONCERN)

There is an established swift group in Cottenham focussed on erecting swift boxes and community engagement. The NRG has a limited role in promoting actions to support the swift population but actively supports the Swift group with shared facilities and occasional PR. Many Cottenham residents have mounted swift boxes on their houses.

Actions:

- Support Cottenham Swift Group as appropriate.
- Ensure that boxes and sightings are recorded on national database

Results Expected:

Increase in local swift population.

Timetable:

2026 and ongoing

GENERAL ACTIONS

10. SEASONAL AND PERMANENT PONDS

Water is important for insects helping to broaden the range of species and thus supplying feed for birds. Water is important for birds such as Turtle Doves to digest small dry seeds. Of particular importance to the region are seasonal ponds that create demanding conditions (flooding and drought) for plants supporting rare and unusual species.

Actions:

- Partially clear vegetation from around ponds at Fen Reeves
- Explore and remedy, if necessary, the water quality at Fen Reeves
- Discourage dog bathing where flea treatment has been applied
- Maintain water at Tenison Manor and WARG Field
- Plant locally important water species
- Protect from ingress of invasive weeds where inappropriate (including non-native species such as *Crassula helmsii* and Himalayan balsam but also reeds and bulrushes where inappropriate,

Timetable:

From 2023 and ongoing

11. POLLINATOR MIXES

Provision of pollen and nectar rich species is a relatively quick means of supporting insect life and thus other fauna that feed on insects. Effort is needed to ensure that supply is available at the start and end of the year when availability is low. Promotion of the plant species needed during different life stages and the specific habitat required for over-wintering.

Actions:

- Collect local seed for planting more widely (possibly after establishment in trays).

- Encourage fruit trees, particularly those blossoming early in the year.
- Encourage trees such as goat and grey willow and ivy providing important pollen and nectar sources at the beginning and end of the year. Ivy provides the larval foodplant for the locally common Holly Blue and overwintering protection for several insect species.
- overwintering protection for several insect species).
- Maintain wildflower mix in village green. Broaden use of mix to include verges
- Maintain and expand wildflower mix in Old Rec
- Introduce more flower mixes into Fen Reeves including Dog Violet and (native) Honeysuckle. Maintain bramble and nettle population.
- Clear glades present in Fen Reeves to broaden diversity.
- Promote locally important species, particularly those such as Meadowsweet, Purple Loosestrife, Mint and Scabious found along the lode
- Maintain cutting regime currently implemented at Tenison Manor, The Old Rec and WARG field. If possible, extend to roads and watercourse margins.
- Encourage local gardeners to include important pollinator plants on their properties through outreach and education and collaboration with the local gardening group.

Timetable:

From 2023 and ongoing

12. SCRUB CLEARANCE AND SCRUB MAINTENANCE

There is a balance between maintaining habitat for nesting and feeding and introduction of habitat to target other threatened species increasing biodiversity.

Actions:

- Coppicing of trees and protection of regrowth from muntjac at Fen Reeves.
- Fen Reeves to be actively managed with thinning and creation of glades
- Ponds at Fen Reeves to be actively cleared and managed

Timetable:

From 2023 and ongoing

13. NEST BOXES

Specific targets:

- Swifts
- House Martins
- Small Birds
- Bats

Actions:

- Encourage merging of targets to maintain balance and help optimise use of cash and resources.
- Construct boxes from pallets
- Erect on suitable sites
- Engage with local youth groups

- Promote in Cottenham newsletter

14. FEED

Actions:

- Plant and maintain fruit trees (apple and cherry) and other species producing fruit such as blackthorn
- Allow grass species to seed
- Broaden range of wildflower plantings to include legumes, knapweed and scabious

Timetable:

From 2023 and ongoing

15. OTHER

- Increased signage (2026/2027)
- Tree planting. Maintenance and replacement (from 2023)
- Natura trail and map (2026/2027)
- Tree guards to be cleared at Fen Reeves (2026/2027)
- Review the possibility of culling muntjac to reduce loss of trees and other plants (2027/2028) (Lead stalker Brampton: Bob Smith - bob.helensmith@gmail.com).
- Continue recording species present using IRecord, ObsIdentify and other mapping Apps such as those with a single purpose such as swiftmapper.
- Engage with Wild Fen Edge and other groups and individuals, to record observations.
- Expansion of "bug hotel" initiative to include follow-up article about the hotel constructed by the Scouts on the Old Rec and how to build a garden version.
- Continuing outreach and education through local wildlife groups, village newsletters and county council sponsored programmes

16. SITES AND POTENTIAL SITES

Tenison manor	Verges
Fen Reeves Wood	Lode
WARG field	Les King Wood
Village Green	Live Role Play (LRP) site owned by Profound Decisions Professional on point-to-point site
Old Rec (Lambs Lane)	Churchyards (Diana Cook from WT. BCN coordinates the Churchyard Conservation Award in Cambridgeshire (diana.cook@wildlifebcn.org))
	Gardens

Cottenham Nature Recovery Group