



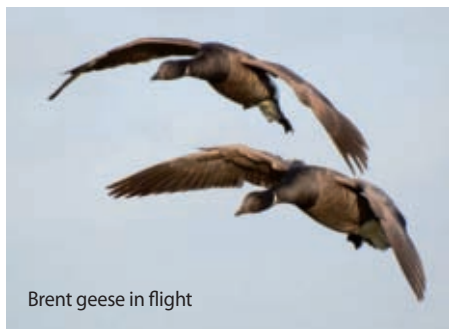
Wintering birds over Langstone Harbour

Spotlight on Wintering Birds

The UK is an important location for wintering birds and we have an international obligation to protect them.

Our large coastline combined with our temperate climate means that many birds come to the UK in the autumn, spending their winter here, before returning to their more northerly breeding grounds in the spring.

The UK is particularly important for waterbirds, providing a home to a significant proportion of many bird populations during the winter months on our estuaries, reservoirs, gravel pits and lakes. A recent report* has highlighted the importance of, amongst others, the Lancashire estuary, The Wash, the Humber and the Thames.



Brent geese in flight

Legislation to protect wintering bird habitats and conservation action has gone some way towards protecting birds but some species, such as the white fronted goose, pochards and purple sandpipers are still in long term decline.

The UK's farmland is also of significance to wintering birds, particularly wintering thrushes, lapwings and golden plovers.

At Thomson Ecology we carry out wintering bird surveys for both conservation organisations and developers. Coastal developments, windfarms and large scale developments will often require these, especially if the development is on or close to a Special Protection Area (SPA) or Ramsar site. We provide an impartial but informed view, often finding ways to allow a development to proceed without impacting significantly on the bird population. Our ornithologists undertake surveys throughout the migration and wintering season to identify bird species, populations, distributions and patterns and highlighting if there are any significant protected species and habitats.

For further information, please give us a call.

**The report was published by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO); Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT); Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB); and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).*

Have you booked your winter surveys?

- Wintering birds
- Badgers
- Otters
- Bat scoping
- Dormice nut surveys
- BREEAM/ Code for sustainable homes

It's also a great time for planning and improvements:

- Biodiversity Audits
- Biodiversity Action Plans and Policies

So give us a call and get your ducks in a row for 2010!



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How biodiverse are you?

You only have to turn on the radio nowadays to hear about some further species under threat. Biodiversity is suffering and man's impact on the environment is largely to blame.

But measures can be taken to counter this (at least partially). Shareholders, employees and local communities are increasingly viewing positive biodiversity policies and actions as an important part of corporate responsibility, alongside other environmental issues.

Enhance biodiversity and you enhance your reputation.

Thomson Ecology can help you to achieve good biodiversity credentials. We can carry out a **Biodiversity Audit** throughout your organisation, highlighting areas of strength and areas for improvement. We can then produce a **Biodiversity Action Plan** detailing the specific actions required. We can even implement these for you.

Use our knowledge and experience to enhance biodiversity in your organisation.

Just give us a call and we'll show you how. Tel: 01483 466 000.



Sparrow nesting boxes

Sparrow nesting boxes are one of many features that can be installed to improve your biodiversity.

Working on the railways...

Thomson Ecology was recently commissioned by Volker Fitzpatrick Ltd to carry out work for Network Rail. An old railway bridge near Nuneaton was being demolished with a new one planned in its place.

A previous survey had identified potential habitat for roosting bats on the site and had recorded five ponds within 500m of the site that could provide suitable habitat for great crested newts.

Thomson Ecologists, with full PTS certification, carried out surveys on the site. We established that there was no evidence of bats or great crested newts residing there, but recommended a watching brief during vegetation clearance as a safeguard in case great



An otter enjoying the water

Otters near Otley

Our Otley office is proud to have completed a project with the Environment Agency for the first ever comprehensive survey of otters on 40 kilometers of the River Aire and adjacent canal.

Thomson Ecology otter specialists found evidence confirming that otters are alive and well along the river - even in Leeds city centre, where footprints were found in the mud below Monk Bridge.

As part of the project, Thomson Ecology produced GIS map layers showing inaccessible areas of habitat where otters can sleep undisturbed, areas where otters are at risk eg, from roads, points at which otter access is restricted due to the built environment and places where they may be disturbed by human activity. The Environment Agency has been using this data to advise planners and developers on where to leave places for otters along the waterways of Leeds. The results are now also providing essential information in planning the large scale Leeds flood alleviation scheme.

Elly Andison from the Environment Agency said *'Thomson Ecology has worked with us on several projects. We can rely on them for their scientific accuracy and clear, comprehensive reporting. The otter survey was particularly interesting and we've found it very useful background when assessing developments along the river.'*



Link-up

crested newts were found. This work is currently underway and the bridge works are progressing.

Dorian Colling, site manager for VolkerFitzpatrick Ltd said *'We take environmental issues very seriously and Thomson Ecology has worked side by side with us on a number of projects. We find them both professional and practical and are happy with their work. We will continue to use their services.'*

Both Thomson Ecology and VolkerFitzpatrick would like to thank local businesses and residents around the Gypsy Lane bridge works for allowing us to visit their land early in the morning and late at night in order to carry out the bat and great crested newt surveys.

Gnawed nut surveys



We know that some of you out there think that we ecologists are barking, so we'll probably have you rolling in the aisles with this one ... gnawed nut surveys. Yes, we're serious. Gnawed hazelnuts are one of the ways in which we can identify whether dormice are present in the locality. Their teeth marks on the shell leave an unmistakable calling card.

Dormice are shy creatures at the best of times, gnawed nuts are the easiest way to spot their presence. In autumn hazelnuts form an important source of food for dormice as they have to build up their fat reserves in preparation for hibernation.

Gnawed nut surveys are best carried out between September and December. **Give us a call and we'll advise you... and we promise you we're not kidding.**

Next generation of wildlife fencing arrives



Our ecologists have been testing the new Caudon™ wildlife fencing.

This new seamless fencing system is quicker to install than panels and results in fewer gaps. It has above and below ground returns. So far, it seems a big improvement on other methods.

For more information, contact our Thomson Habitats team on 01483 466 066.

Legislation Up-date

Whilst not a change in the law, the Woolley case highlights the importance to local authorities of correctly applying the law.



**Richard Arnold, Technical Director
for Thomson Ecology**

Local planning authorities must apply the same three tests as Natural England when deciding whether to grant planning permission where species protected by European Law may be harmed.

The three tests are;

- the activity must be for imperative reasons of overriding public interest or for public health and safety;
- there must be no satisfactory alternative;
- favourable conservation status of the species must be maintained.

This judgment clarifies a legal duty which was already in existence although many planning authorities were not applying it correctly.

His Honour Judge Waksman QC, in the High Court in June this year, handed down this ruling in the case of R (on the application of Simon Woolley) v Cheshire East Borough Council concerning a development with a bat roost.

The species protection provisions of the Habitats Directive, as implemented by the Conservation Regulations, contain three 'derogation tests' which must be applied by Natural England when deciding whether to grant a licence to a person carrying out an activity which would harm a European protected species for example bats, great crested newts dormice or otters. This licence is usually obtained after planning permission has been granted. This judgment makes it clear that the local planning authority must also apply these three tests. Planners failing to do so, will be in breach of Regulation 3(4) of the Conservation Regulations.

The case related to an application for a judicial review of a decision to grant planning permission for a development in Wilmslow where an Edwardian Villa was to be demolished and three luxury apartments built. A bat roost had been identified at the original property

following a survey. The bats issue was raised but was not given as a reason for refusal. It was common ground that in order to demolish the building a licence from Natural England was needed. This was granted and the building demolished. The judicial review was brought by Mr. Woolley claiming that, amongst other things, the planning authority had failed in its duty by failing to give consideration to the three derogation tests. The court agreed.

When dealing with cases where a European Protected Species may be affected, a planning authority... has a statutory duty under Regulation 3(4) to have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive in the exercises of its functions.

This is not a change to the law and, as usual, discussing your development at an early stage with your ecologist will make sure that these three tests are taken into account where European Protected Species may be present. ■



Amphibians and reptiles: going, going...nearly gone?

More than half of all European amphibians and two-fifths of all reptiles are disappearing, according to new studies commissioned by the European Commission and carried out by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The results highlight alarming declines for a range of frogs, toads, newts, snakes and lizards. The study shows that of Europe's 85 species of amphibians, 23% now feature on the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species. Of 151 reptile species, 22% are on the Red List.

Stavros Dimas, European Commissioner for the Environment said "This reflects the enormous pressure

we are placing on Europe's plants and animals, and underlines the need to rethink our relationship to the natural world. These trends cannot continue."

The study highlights the vital role that conservation has to play if we are to preserve our natural biodiversity.

Developers can play an important part by incorporating ecology into the early planning stages of a project. This can allow the development to proceed smoothly whilst also allowing reptiles and amphibians to thrive.

If you are developing a site, we can advise you on ways to incorporate wildlife into your plans and comply with the law. ■

Surveying Forestry Commission land

We have recently finished surveying 5697 hectares of land for Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS). This large scale survey of open spaces on the Forestry Commission Estate recorded the areas of all BAP Priority Habitats and the vegetation communities present within them using the National Vegetation Classification.

One of our Principal Ecologists undertook a comprehensive survey using the FCS methodology for open habitats consisting of weeks of intensive survey. Management recommendations were then made for all habitats and species.

The survey area included Forestry Commission lands in Glen Roy on the edge of the Dalradian Supergroup of rocks, home to some interesting calcareous flushes and meadows, and South Laggan in the Great Glen, where the lesser twayblade orchid clings to craggy ravines. The vast mires and bogs of the Flow Country in Sutherland were also mapped, including the foothills of Ben Kilibreck, where we recorded some of the rarest species of sphagnum moss. ■



Reed canary grass and meadowsweet in Great Glen, Scotland

A day in the life of an ecologist...working on the Welsh Assembly Agri-Environment Scheme monitoring programme.

Our Welsh team are busy surveying approximately 700 sites under the Welsh Assembly Agri-Environment Schemes. The surveys will reveal whether biodiversity is being maintained or improved on these sites.



The majestic scenery of Snowdonia

One of our intrepid ecologists relates a typical day surveying in the Welsh mountains:

6.45am The alarm signals the start of another day's surveying. My bones ache from the long damp days already spent scrambling up mountainsides in beautiful, but definitely wet, Wales.

7.30am I'm on the road, winding through Postman Pat lanes, luckily with the aid of my satnav (although even this gets confused at times).

8.45am I finally arrive at the remote 'farm of the day', greeted by the sound of ferocious barking. The farmer comes out and reassures me that all is safe. I indicate the two sites that I need to survey, up the side of a beautiful, but mist-laden mountain. His eyes widen in disbelief. 'Some places up there we won't go. There's bogs up there that'll swallow a sheep in seconds.'

9.00am Having disinfected my boots, I set off, relying heavily on my electronic mobile mapper as well as my knowledge of plants. If I see a bog bean poking up from a spongy bed of sphagnum moss, I'll be very wary. I don't want to disappear into a bog along with the missing sheep.

10.10am I finally reach the site. It's been a difficult climb and I've slipped over several times. The sun has peeped through the mist and the view down the valley to the fen is stunning. Very few people must ever see this view. I feel very privileged.

10.30am I've taken photos which exactly match the view taken by previous surveyors. This marks the start of the survey and from here I map the route of the transect.

1.30pm I've been busy marking out and surveying quadrats within the site. On the mobile mapper, I record the different species and numbers of plants observed in each quadrat. These will later be electronically compared with previous records.

1.40pm The first survey is complete. I find a dry spot and have a well needed rest whilst eating my sandwiches. I'm so glad it's still dry. Eating lunch in the rain is never fun.

2.00pm I'm off again. This time the site is near a similar valley on the other side of the mountain. Not wanting to lose height, I carefully pick my way around the steep craggy side of the mountain.

3.00pm I reach the second survey site and the whole process is repeated...but this time in the rain. Luckily my waterproofs really are waterproof because when it rains in Snowdonia, it really rains. Keeping my feet wide to steady myself in the wind, I enter the plant details into the mobile mapper (fantastic in the rain... no more days of soggy paper forms and it gives really accurate location data).

5.50pm I've finally finished. I've packed up my gear and am sooo tired. I track my way back to the car, climbing over fences and jumping streams which are now turning into rapids due to the rain pouring off the mountain.

6.50pm Back at the car, the dogs are barking madly again. I get out of my wet gear, disinfect my boots again and head back home.

7.50pm I return to the house, too weary to cook, so it's scrambled eggs followed by a hot shower.

8.45pm I phone the next farmer to check that it's still ok to survey his farm tomorrow, sort my e-mails, upload the day's data from my mobile mapper and fill out the required paperwork

10.00pm I'm beat. Lights out...no need to count Welsh sheep tonight...zzzz.



Win a bottle of champagne!

To celebrate the launch of our new website www.thomsonecology.com we're giving away 10 free bottles of champagne.

The first 10 readers* who identify and e-mail to us the correct latin name of the creature pictured below, will each be given a free bottle of champagne. We will announce the winners on our website.**

To enter simply e-mail the answer to caroline.mackay@thomsonecology.com

*offer excludes any reader under 18 years old and employees or relatives of employees who work for Thomson Ecology, Thomson Habitats or other ecological consultancies.
**Competition closes 23rd December 2009.



Thomson Ecologists volunteer time...

You'd think that with having to deal with ecology all day, you'd find our hardworking ecologists with their feet up watching the telly in their spare time. But no...they're out in the field again, volunteering their expertise. Some of the worthy causes they're currently involved in are:

- Monitoring the very rare Bechstein's bat with the Surrey Bat Group
- Re-introducing great crested newts to Lower Wharfedale with the Wharfedale Naturalists Society
- Compiling an up-to-date bird atlas with the British Trust for Ornithology to measure how environmental change is affecting bird populations across the UK
- Surveying the distribution of sand lizards and smooth snakes across Surrey and Hampshire with the Surrey Amphibian and Reptile group
- Surveying the population of Nathusius pipistrelles with the Bat Conservation Trust.

A dedicated bunch indeed!

ISO accreditation



We are delighted to announce that we have been recently awarded the internationally recognized ISO9001 and ISO14001 quality and environment standards.

These international standards demonstrate to clients and suppliers alike our professional approach to all aspects of our work. They also demonstrate our commitment to monitoring and improving our performance.

Printed on revive 50:50 Silk, a recycled paper containing 50% recycled waste and 50% virgin fibre and manufactured at a mill certified with ISO 14001 environmental management standard.



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