

BOOKS FROM
KAIROS PRESS

[TO HOME PAGE](#)

Rare Wildlife in Leicestershire and Rutland

Andrew Heaton



Leicestershire
and Rutland



LEICESTERSHIRE MUSEUMS
ARTS & RECORDS SERVICE

in association with
KAIROS PRESS
1998

Copyright © Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, 1998

ISBN 1 871344 17 4

First edition, 1998

Design and Layout by Robin Stevenson, Kairos Press
Body text in Aldine 721 BT, 11pt.
Imagesetting by Double Vision, Leicester
Printed in Great Britain by Norwood Press, Anstey, Leicester.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.
A CIP catalogue record for this publication
is available from the British Library.

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust
1 West Street, Leicester, LE1 6UU

Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service
216 Birstall Road, Birstall, LE4 4DG

in association with

KAIROS PRESS
552 Bradgate Road
Newtown Linford
Leicester LE6 0HB

Contents

Acknowledgements	6
What is a Red Data Book?	7
Putting Together the Leicestershire Red Data Book	8
The Full Red Data Book	9
Conserving the Red Data Book Species	10
Mammals	13
Birds	18
Amphibians and Reptiles	26
Fish	30
Butterflies and Moths	49
Beetles	55
Other Insects	60
Invertebrates	63
Flowering plants and Ferns	65
Mosses and Liverworts	72
Lower Plants	75
The Future for Wildlife in Leicestershire and Rutland	77
Further Reading	78
Index of Species	79



Reed warbler

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The production of this book would not have been possible without the efforts of many people over the years who have worked to record and conserve wildlife in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Particular mention should be made of the authors of the full Red Data Book, as listed on page 9. Michael Jeeves and Jenny Harris, Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, and Derek Lott and Darwyn Sumner, Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service, have been especially helpful in providing information and illustrative material. Many useful suggestions, on all aspects of the publication, were made by Robin Stevenson of Kairos Press. Photographs have been provided by Peter Gamble, Peter Jones, Jim Eaton, Bob Stebbings, Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency; thanks are due to them all.

The black and white illustrations have been drawn from a number of sources including Hulme, F E (1906) *Familiar Wild Flowers*; Lydekker, R (ed.) (1896) *The Royal Natural History*; Wood, J G (1889) *Lane and Field*; Wood, J G (c1900) *The Brook and its Banks*.

WHAT IS A RED DATA BOOK?

*R*ed Data Books, an idea first developed by the late Sir Peter Scott, are becoming increasingly important tools in conservation. They help to draw attention to the plight of the rarest and most threatened animals and plants. They also identify the essential conservation measures that need to be taken to ensure the survival of these species. This has become of great significance with the current interest in biodiversity, both nationally and at a local scale – in this case, the local authority areas of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

Initially, Red Data Books (RDBs) were produced for a particular group of animals or plants at a national scale. Recently, county Red Data Books have been produced to cover all groups of animals and plants found in an area – this present volume is an example of that approach. So far, coverage of the country has been rather patchy, though the East Midlands has been well served; the first county RDB was that for Lincolnshire which appeared in 1988, whilst the Derbyshire RDB was published in 1995, and Northamptonshire's in 1996.

The Red Data Book for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland has been compiled over the last few years through the efforts of a large number of people. It has been a joint project between Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, Leicestershire County Council Museums, Arts and Records Service and English Nature.

PUTTING TOGETHER THE LEICESTERSHIRE RED DATA BOOK

The Leicestershire RDB differs from the other East Midlands reports in an important respect. Whilst the other counties set out all the information in a single publication, for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, a series of RDB volumes has been produced, each of which contains much detail on the plant or animal group concerned. It is from these “full” RDB reports that the information has been taken to compile this summary. The full volumes that have been published so far are listed on page 9.

In choosing the critical species to be included, each of the RDB reports was produced to a common set of six criteria. These were:

R	Rarity	Species recorded from three or fewer one-kilometre national grid squares since 1960.
E	Endangered species and habitats	Species confined to sites and habitats which are particularly threatened by development or land management practices.
D	Declining species	All species which have significantly declined in numbers to the point where their survival is at risk.
B	Red Data Book species	Those species which are listed in the various national Red Data Books.
N	Nationally Notable species	Species which do not automatically qualify for national RDBs, but which are recognised as being important on a national scale.
P	Legally Protected species	Species which are given legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and other legislation. (P) indicates partial protection.

THE FULL RED DATA BOOK

The full Red Data Book for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland consists of the volumes listed below. In each of these, all the threatened species in that group are allocated to one of the categories shown opposite, and details of their ecology, threats and conservation needs are given.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Publication date</u>
Vascular Plants	M Jeeves	1993
Coleoptera	D Lott	1995
Birds	M Jeeves	1996
Mammals, Reptiles, Amphibians and Fish	J Dawson and A Heaton	1997
Butterflies and Moths	J McPhail and R Morris	1997
Bryophytes	D Ballard and A Fletcher	1997
Lichens	A Fletcher	In draft
Fungi	Fungus Study Group	In preparation

These volumes are available from Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. The information in this book is taken from the full volumes; not every species can be included here, but it gives a flavour of the wide range of wildlife which is under threat locally, and in need of conservation action.

CONSERVING THE RED DATA BOOK SPECIES

*L*ike many Midland counties, Leicestershire and Rutland have lost much of their wildlife to pressures such as development and agricultural intensification. Much remains, of course, especially in certain areas – Rutland Water is a wetland of international importance for its waterfowl populations; Charnwood Forest, with its heathland and woodland, is nationally important for wildlife as well as being of international geological significance. However, there is a need to be ever-vigilant to the threats, and to take positive action to maintain the wildlife populations which we have. This Red Data Book is intended to highlight these threats and actions.

Statutory protection is given to key species, and the sites they inhabit, by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Around 90 sites (most in Leicestershire, one fifth in Rutland and just one in the city) are given legal protection under this Act by their designation as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). These are the real gems of the countryside: SSSIs are chosen as the best examples of the various habitats – Bradgate Park and Charnwood Lodge for heathlands, the woodlands of Owston and Launde, wetlands such as Narborough Bog and Great Bowden Borrow Pit. SSSI designation gives protection by placing restrictions on landowners' activities, and they are also significant considerations in the planning process.

In addition to the SSSIs, around 1000 Wildlife Sites, important at the county scale, are recognised for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and appear in planning documents. Lacking statutory protection, these may not be the very top sites, but they provide the context for the SSSIs – if they disappear, key species will be under even greater pressure. There is little future for those species marooned on island SSSIs if the surrounding countryside is hostile.

A number of SSSIs and some Wildlife Sites are managed as nature reserves. The Wildlife Trust has by far the greatest number of these – around 40 across the two counties. They range from small local sites such as Our Lady's Well in Oakham to the expanses of Rutland Water. Other nature reserves are run by local authorities – Beacon Hill by Leicestershire

County Council, Burbage Common by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, for example – by English Nature (Muston Meadows National Nature Reserve), or by other voluntary bodies (such as Plantlife's Seaton Meadows). In the City, several sites are managed by Environ, some in collaboration with the Wildlife Trust.

It is important to note that these sites are actively managed by the bodies that run them. It is not true that you can simply put a fence around a site, leave it alone and call it a nature reserve. Reserves need management to maintain the best conditions for their wildlife, which can take up a lot of resources. Neglect – lack of management – has led to a lot of the problems facing animals and plants in the Red Data Book – the scrubbing over of grassland sites, lack of woodland management, and similar. Unfortunately, even in SSSIs, it is not possible to enforce management if landowners are not interested.

The other aspect of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is the protection given to key individual species, which prevents them and their homes from being disturbed. As well as giving protection to all native birds (with the exception of a few pest species), the Act also provides specific protection for a number of animals and plants. Amongst those found in Leicestershire and Rutland are the otter, water vole, dormouse, the bats, great crested newt and other amphibians and reptiles, and the native crayfish. The European Habitats Directive has recently confirmed the importance of many of these and given protection to a further range of species such as bullhead, brook lamprey and spined loach. All of these species need special consideration in the Leicestershire and Rutland context, and hence they feature in this Red Data Book.

The conservation of wildlife species has again been given a boost in recent years by the signing, by the UK Government, of the Biodiversity Convention at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. This led directly, at a local level, to the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) which has taken significant work from local conservationists recently. After the preparation of an audit, detailing the wildlife resource of the area, a full biodiversity plan was published in 1998, which identified priorities for conservation and defined goals and objectives. It was set out in the form of action plans for individual species and habitats – 17 habitats and 14 species initially, including species appearing in the Red Data Book such as redstart, black poplar and bats. The publication of the BAP was a joint effort of a large number of different bodies, and it has led to a greatly increased realisation of the need to conserve vulnerable species, and the resources and actions which are required to do this.

As well as the Leicestershire/Rutland BAP, the National Forest has prepared its own BAP, which covers western Leicestershire as well as parts of Derbyshire and Staffordshire, and Charnwood Borough and Leicester City are currently drafting BAPs for their areas of jurisdiction. If the resources can be found to undertake the actions which are identified in each of these, there may be a brighter future for the species that they are targeting. Perhaps some of the animals and plants detailed in this Red Data Book can be removed from future editions as, through biodiversity action, their populations recover to the point where they are no longer rare and threatened.



Common lizard

MAMMALS

Mammals, though including some of our best-loved native animals, are rather rarely seen in the wild. This means, of course, that declines in populations can occur without being noticed. Brown hares and harvest mice, for example, appear to have suffered from modern agricultural practices, whilst both badgers (protected under their own legislation) and hedgehogs suffer from high numbers of road deaths. All these species (together with the shrews, about which we know rather little) need to be kept under scrutiny to ensure that no significant problems are affecting their populations.



Water shrews

However, it is upon six individual species and one group (the bats) that the Red Data Book concentrates – the rarest and most threatened in Leicestershire and Rutland. Three of these are rodents. The **yellow-necked mouse**, near to the northern edge of its British distribution, has rarely been recorded in the two counties. It is a creature of ancient woodland, so its most recent record, of one trapped in a house in Oakham, is unusual. In a county so lacking in woodland, the hopes of a return of this species appear slim, though it is possible that nestboxes provided for another rarity, the **dormouse**, may help by providing artificial wintering sites.

Dormice require open mixed broadleaved woodland with a rich understorey providing aerial pathways around the wood and a variety of food, notably hazelnuts. With the early loss of ancient woodland in

Leicestershire, dormice were probably never common, and in recent decades there have been only occasional records from woods at Owston, Launde and Pickworth. At the last site, dormouse nest boxes have been erected and monitored, resulting in several positive sightings which indicate at least one breeding population in the county. Further surveys along these lines may detect others, but where they are apparently absent, the reinstatement of appropriate management of woods by coppicing may allow successful reintroductions of dormice from elsewhere.

With populations declining enormously in recent years, the **water vole** may be the most threatened British mammal. A survey in 1994/95 recorded only 12 positive sightings of water voles in Leicester and a further 17 in the rest of the county, with an almost complete absence from major rivers and canals. Only at one site, an aquatic garden centre on the edge of Ashby de la Zouch with a series of ponds, was there a thriving population. Factors such as pollution, excessive river management and cultivation right up to the riverbank have affected water voles, and the last straw has been the spread of American mink which prey upon them very effectively. Control of mink is difficult, though it may be possible on a local scale; the restoration of wetland habitats alongside rivers may be a more effective way of looking after the water vole.

The two carnivores in the Red Data Book are doing rather better than the rodents. **Otters**, which disappeared from the Midlands in the 1960s due to pollution of watercourses by toxic agricultural chemicals, have been moving back from their Welsh stronghold and from introduced populations in East Anglia. There have been several Leicestershire sightings in recent years, including a dead cub in the Ashby Canal in 1993 and a road death on the A1 near Stretton in 1994. Captive-bred otters have also been released into the Rivers

Gwash and Welland in Rutland, and are now believed to have bred. The construction of artificial holts, to compensate for lack of natural resting and breeding sites, may help to restore the population.



Otter



Polecat

Equally spectacularly, **polecats** have spread back across the Midlands from Wales in recent years, and the first Leicestershire record for 100 years was, ironically, run over on the A5 near Wibtoft in 1994. Polecats are very adaptable animals and, providing they are not persecuted by misguided landowners, they should be able to recolonise the county.

Roe deer are real rarities in Leicestershire, there having been only four recent records of them, in the woodlands of the Skeffington Valley. Further information is obviously needed on them, and landowners persuaded to fence new woodlands adequately, rather than carrying out deer culls.

Bats generally have suffered enormously from loss of breeding and hibernation sites, particularly ancient woodland, from toxic timber treatment of buildings that they use, and from the intensification of agriculture leading to declines in their insect prey. Ten bat species are present in Leicestershire. Even for the most numerous, the **pipistrelle**, only 200 nursery roosts have been identified, and numbers have remained much the same in recent years. **Brown long-eared bats**, the second commonest species, are known from 100 breeding sites; their low, slow hunting flight makes them vulnerable to domestic cats.

Records of the **noctule** and **Daubenton's bats**, both species regularly found near open water, are widespread in the county, but only very few nursery roosts are known. It is a similar situation for the **whiskered** (a woodland edge species) and **natterer's bats** (found in buildings, notably several parish churches).



Daubenton's bat

Four species of bats are rare in Leicestershire as well as nationally. **Brandt's bat** may be overlooked through confusion with the whiskered; there is only one record, a male found dying at Frog Island, Leicester, in 1987. The most recent **barbastelles** seen were two roosting in a stable block at Barnsdale in 1986; the stables have now been converted into timeshare dwellings. There have been a few records of **Leisler's bat**, including 25 females at a nursery roost at Woodhouse Eaves, which they later vacated.

Most surprisingly, there are two records of the **greater horseshoe bat**, a species generally confined to south-west England. One was in disused mine workings in the north-east of the county, and the other at a derelict underground site in the north-west – this bat had been ringed in the Forest of Dean. For all of the bat species, known haunts need to be strictly protected, with grilles placed on underground hibernation sites where appropriate. The erection of bat boxes will also help. Changes in agricultural practices may be needed to restore good feeding areas for bats.

Red Data Book Mammals						
	R Rarity	E Endangered	D Declining	B Red Data Book	N Nationally Notable	P Legally Protected
Greater Horse-shoe Bat	R	E	D	B	N	P
Whiskered Bat			D?	B		P
Brandt's Bat	R		D?	B		P
Natterer's Bat			D?	B		P
Daubenton's Bat			D?	B		P
Leisler's Bat	R		D?	B		P
Noctule			D	B		P
Pipistrelle			D?	B		P
Barbastelle	R		D?	B	N	P
Brown Long-eared Bat			D	B		P
Polecat	R			B		(P)
Otter				B		P
Roe Deer	R					
Dormouse	R		D	B		P
Yellow-necked Mouse	R			B		
Water Vole			D	B		(P)



Field voles