



**Herefordshire
Wildlife Trust**



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A Brief History of Herefordshire Wildlife Trust

The Herefordshire Wildlife Trust started in 1962 as the Herefordshire and Radnorshire Nature Trust. The moving force behind it was Christopher Cadbury, the president of what is now the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, who had lived in Herefordshire. He asked a local GP and naturalist, Dr Charles Walker, to help start up a county trust. It was felt that both Herefordshire and Radnorshire were too sparsely populated to support their own Trust, so a joint Trust was established. With the River Wye flowing through both counties, the links between the two seemed natural. Strong support for the fledgling Trust also came from influential figures in Herefordshire such as Harry Williamson, founder of the Wyevale Garden Centres and George Clive of Whitfield Estate, a very knowledgeable conservationist.

Lt. Col. Ernle Gilbert became the first Vice-Chairman in 1968 and replaced Dr Walker as chair in 1972. In those early days, the Trust mainly concentrated on the acquisition of nature reserves, both to protect particular species and to conserve threatened habitats. The Trust did not have funds to buy reserves, so most of the early reserves were acquired with the generous financial help of Christopher Cadbury, the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, World Wildlife Fund and the Nature Conservancy Council. Ernle Gilbert was also instrumental in setting up the Conservation Development Trust, the aim of which was to raise funds to assist the Nature Trust to purchase new Reserves.

The first purchases on the Lugg Meadows were helped by £30,000 from the Development Trust and formed the basis for the eventual acquisition of Lower House Farm and considerably more of the Lugg Meadows. All the Reserve Management work was done by volunteers, in close co-operation with the Nature Conservancy Council, under the leadership of Jim Watkins, Volunteer Reserves Manager. Further help in managing the Reserves came from the Manpower Services Commission and Jim Watkins was joined by a deputy, Charles Wooler, in 1979.

Sue Holland was the first paid member of staff, taken on as Conservation Officer. Initially the Trust relied on the use of rooms in Castle Street, Hereford as its headquarters. However, as the Trust grew, there was an increasing need for another headquarters because of shortage of space.

In 1987, with increased support for conservation in Radnorshire and their need to link to other Trusts in Wales to obtain grant funding and support, the decision was taken for Herefordshire and Radnorshire to separate. Hence, in October 1987 Herefordshire Nature Trust was officially launched as an independent Trust under the Chairmanship of Dr Anthea Brian. By this time Herefordshire had eight branches around the county.

In 1991, a bypass around Hereford was proposed to cross the Lugg Meadows and this plan was vehemently opposed by the Trust. A 'Bypass conference' was conducted in Hereford, which eventually led to the eastern bypass route being turned down. The search to find a headquarters was concluded in 1996, when a Grade II listed building, Lower House Farm, was bought with enormous help from the Heritage Lottery Fund, members and local support. An extra 41 acres of Lugg Meadows was acquired with it and the work went ahead to restore the building use as a headquarters.

In 1998, the Trust, encouraged by English Nature, carried out a management review. The recommendations from this review were not accepted by the Management Council, leading to

the departure of several key staff, who went on to set up a rival organisation known as the Herefordshire Wildlife Trust. It was several years before the Trust got back on track, appointing Sarah Ayling as Chief Executive in 2002. A full Governance review was completed, and new memorandum and articles were drawn up to reflect the renewed purpose of the Trust.

The Trust broadened its scope and interests, introducing a range of new projects with grant funding from various sources. Key new activities included a Millennium Map survey of the county training new ecologists in Phase 1 survey techniques, the introduction of the Wildplay programme engaging children and conservation projects such as the Community Commons and the Woolhope Dome project.

The fortunes of the Trust fluctuated over the years as project funding came on stream and then concluded, but in 2014 the appointment of Evan Bowen Jones as Chief Executive signalled a new phase of expansion and re-organisation for the Trust. This positioned the Trust as the foremost conservation charity in the County and greatly increased our visibility and influence.

Recognising this change, the alternative Wildlife Trust relinquished its claim on this title, so Herefordshire Nature Trust was finally able to change its name to Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, bringing it in line with others in the federation of The Wildlife Trusts.

A key achievement in 2016 was the acquisition of the Herefordshire Council assets at Queenwood Country Park and Bodenham Lake Local Nature Reserve. These have been transferred on long term lease to a partnership between Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and New Leaf. After managing the sites successfully for two years, the Trust took the decision to relocate its operations to Queenswood Country Park and to sell the Lower House Farm building, which was now in need of considerable repair and upgrade. This move was completed in July 2018, reuniting the staff on one site.

Since 2018 the Trust has been gone from strength of strength, improving the management of its Nature Reserves, playing a prominent role in advocacy for wildlife across the county and increasing our levels of engagement with members, volunteers and supporters. Our '2020 Vision for Wildlife' called for:

- Herefordshire revived as a county with thriving wildlife - with nature reserves and wild spaces at the heart of an expanding and effective Nature Recovery Network.
- Space for nature across our farmed landscape and extending into our towns and villages.
- Healthy, naturally functioning rivers and floodplains - providing clean water, mitigating flooding and alive with wildlife.
- Flowery meadows and commons buzzing with life, natural woodlands alive with birdsong, ancient trees properly venerated, and road verges, hedgerows and village greens managed for wildlife.
- Wild spaces accessible with 10 minutes of every home for everyone to enjoy and appreciate.
- A Green economy – with Herefordshire ahead of the curve on promoting and installing green technologies and promoting green tourism.
- Herefordshire seen as a vibrant 'green county' - attracting vibrant new young families for the quality of life and the countryside experience.
- A strong partnership of organisations and communities across Herefordshire collaborating to address the climate emergency and ecological crisis.

By 2022, 60 years after it's beginning, the Trust manages 60 nature reserves alongside its continuing advocacy, habitat restoration projects and engagement and education work. Membership has similarly grown to over 6,500 members.