

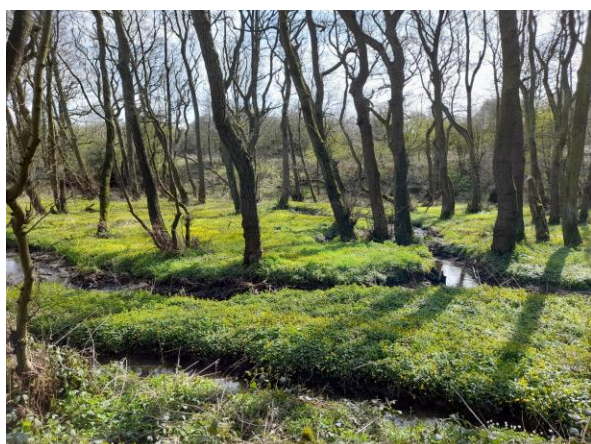


April 2021

Welcome to Earthly Matters, the new blog dedicated to the partnership between CEMEX and the RSPB. Each month, we'll share a couple of short stories including biodiversity achievements from across the business, employee stories and sustainable activities you can undertake - plus regular competitions (with prizes!)

We hope you enjoy the April edition of the blog - please do get in touch on gb-communicationsandpublicaffairs@cemex.com with any feedback or wildlife stories you would like to share.

Native woodlands in spring



When you think about spring, particularly spring flowers, I'm sure that daffodils, snowdrops, and bluebells will be top of your list. What all of these have in common is they all grow from bulbs and are native woodland flowers. Native woodlands in spring are the most magical places to be. These plants have evolved to live in harmony with the tree's lifecycle, making use of the short window in spring when the weather warms a little, but the trees do not yet have their leaves. This means the plants on the ground can

truly access warm sunlight to grow and flower, without shading by the tree canopy. For many of us spring is the beginning of a new year, bringing the feeling of hope and rejuvenation, as we emerge from winter. This is particularly needed in these Covid times!

Woodland habitats are important for a whole host of different reasons and a well-managed woodland supports a diverse range of plants and animals. But the woodland also helps protect the environment by providing valuable services – these services are called ECOSYSTEM SERVICES. Examples could include purification of air as part of the natural respiratory processes of plants, the soil and roots help percolate rain and groundwater cleaning it, and the process of photosynthesis sees plants absorb the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide which helps regulate the climate. We always took these services for granted, but with natural habitat in decline, due to human impacts both in quality and quantity. We need to adjust our thinking and behaviours to protect, enhance and create more of these habitats for the future.

As part of our approach to land management we are keen to create, develop, and preserve good quality woodland habitat. Part of the biodiversity management process includes checking progress by carrying out surveys to monitor a habitat's quality. For woodland we would monitor tree and scrub species, checking to see how they are developing. Another key part of this process is checking on the wildflowers and fungi, because this gives us a very good indication as to how healthy the woodland is, but also how well it supports populations of other animals.

We are lucky to have some good examples of woodland across CEMEX UK. From oak and birch woodland over acid soils at quarries like Rugeley and West Heath which are home to specialised species to more neutral or alkaline soils which support woodland with a more diverse range of species. We also have a very good example of a rare habitat called wet woodland at Forest Hill Quarry in Cheshire. Native woodland is a priority habitat and now only covers 2.5% of the UK, and wet woodland has been in serious decline across the UK and has disappeared from many areas.

Woodland plants are remarkable in their ability to survive and thrive with such restricted access to light. Consequently, they are slow growing and some, like the bluebell, take seven years to produce their first flower and are protected by law. The presence of these specialist woodland flowers are indicators of ancient woodland; land that has been continuously wooded since 1600. Check out an ancient woodland indicator list [here](#) - you could look for these flowers in your local woodland.

Spring wildlife gardening tips

Buying and planting native plants, like spring bulbs can bring the first signs of the season into your garden and be a vital food source to the first bees and pollinators too! But if you don't already have them they need to be on your list for planting in autumn.

With the onset of spring we start to clear away the winter garden debris, but often the leaf litter is the shelter for overwintering insects, so don't clear all the garden in one go and leave what you do clear overnight, before it goes in the garden bin and you'll be saving a few ladybirds. You could also repurpose the leaf mulch under the shrubs and bushes, this will help the soils keep their moisture in the event of a dry spring. It will also help the birds as they'll use some of it as nesting material. You could also collect and put out some sheep's wool (not pet hair), as nest material too.

Things to look out for in spring – brimstone butterflies, early bumblebees, and blackthorn blossom, catkins.

What have you spotted in spring? Let us know via the details at the bottom of the page.

Image credits: Jenny Oldroyd and Sean Cassidy



Wildlife in Lockdown - Andy Scott's Hedgehogs



16 years ago, in about November time, we moved into our new house in Surrey. The garden had been left and become largely overgrown and thick with ivy. I was working in earnest tidying up the garden pulling away the ivy and digging over the ground. I was just about to put my spade in again, when I saw a tiny little hedgehog, all curled up. I was horrified for a moment because I'd so nearly put my spade through it! I couldn't just leave the little thing there, now I'd removed much of its cover, so I decided to make it a safe place. I turned a large pot planter on its side and filled it with

leaves and garden cuttings and placed it behind a bush - I tucked the little hedgehog in there - hoping I'd not disturbed it too much.

However, years went by and we never saw a hedgehog again. Not until May time in 2020, when I was looking out the kitchen window in the dark and saw two little blobs on the front grass. I saw the blobs wobble a bit, left to right as hedgehogs do when they are walking and then realised what they were... I popped out and there were two little hedgehogs foraging in the grass. This was the first time in all those years, it was fantastic, I was so pleased.

From then on all through the summer we kept seeing one or two hedgehogs, almost nightly in the garden, it was such a privilege. One night my son Christian was in the garden cabin on the computer with his mates, and he saw seven hedgehogs all foraging in the garden, we were utterly amazed. They must have been a whole family with this year's babies. All summer we put out hedgehog food regularly and even bought a hedgehog house which we filled with leaves. They are such cute little creatures and I was so sad to think that they had been lost from this part of the country, it was a joy to see them again and now I'm eagerly looking out for them hoping we get them returning this spring - maybe they used our hedgehog house, although I dare not look in case we disturb them.

by Andy Scott, Land and Development Manager, CEMEX UK

Have you found joy in nature or had a special wildlife experience during lockdown? We would really like to hear your wildlife stories and publish them as part of this blog, pictures would be great too if you have them. Please email your story to gb-communicationsandpublicaffairs@cemex.com

Image credit: Tim Melling

No travel restrictions for sand martins



Sand martins are possibly one of the most familiar birds to anyone working in a sand and gravel quarry. This is the key time to see them as they return to the UK for breeding, but what else do you know about them?

Find out more about these marvellous birds and hear from Andy Barber, Quarry Manager at Berkswell Quarry, as he talks about the sand martins that visit his site.

Read the full article in UK News [here](#)

Image credit: Tim Melling

Send us your stories!

We are looking for staff stories to include in upcoming blogs, these can be experiences from work or home.

Send us your wildlife stories, questions and encounters and receive a free RSPB gift when it is featured; choose from a bird box, bird feeder or RSPB garden bird guide book, or RSPB book on enhancing your garden for wildlife.

Contact gb-communicationsandpublicaffairs@cemex.com