



Welcome to the February 2026 edition of **Earthly Matters**, the blog dedicated to the partnership between Cemex and the RSPB.



### Partnership Update

**By Carl Cornish, RSPB Senior Business Conservation Adviser**

This month I've spent a couple of days with the North Chiltern Conservation Volunteers at Cemex's Kensworth Nature Reserve. The reserve is an area of chalk grassland that's important for wildflowers and insects, with several nationally rare and scarce butterfly species present. The volunteers have been doing a fantastic job removing Blackthorn and Dogwood scrub from the grassland – a back-breaking task using tree poppers on shrubs with long, matted root systems. The tool grips the stem in a metal jaw and is pulled back to remove the shrub and its root, providing a more permanent solution than cutting alone. Dead vegetation has also been cut and raked off, helping to keep the grassland open for its specialist plants and insects. Horseshoe Vetch has been planted as it's the larval foodplant of Chalkhill Blue. I found a male on the reserve last summer and, with luck, the species will colonise from nearby sites and start breeding.

Mark Gough, Quarry Manager, has been liaising with the local Wildlife Trust for getting the site grazed by cattle. Seven cows were on site from late autumn into winter, with Mark keeping an eye out for their welfare. The cows help remove taller vegetation.

This demonstrates the successful partnership effort in managing the site for wildlife. Kensworth is one of the priority sites for the Cemex - RSPB partnership this year. Other priority sites focus on managing areas of important biodiversity outside of operational areas (eg, Lowland Heathland at Rugeley), restoration, and supporting the planning team with extensions and new quarry sites.



Volunteers Kate (above left), Claire (right) and Richard (background) removing Blackthorn and Dogwood with tree poppers.



Volunteers Linda (left) and Andy (right) removing cut vegetation.



Cows at Kensworth, photo: Mark Gough

## Focus on Chalk Grassland

By Carl Cornish

Last month I mentioned that habitats rich with wildlife often don't look attractive, but Chalk Grassland is both beautiful and biodiverse. It doesn't look it this early in the year but come Spring and Summer it will be awash with the colour of wildflowers and alive with insects. It's a habitat that engages the senses: a palette of colours perfumed with the scent of wildflowers, and the buzz of grasshoppers from within the vegetation and the song of a Skylark as it hovers above. It's also a tasty habitat because it is nature's herb garden, with Basil, Thyme and Wild Marjoram and other plants used to be eaten. There's one called Salad Burnett because its leaves were used in salads.

Like all open habitats in the UK, if Chalk Grassland was left unmanaged it would become colonised by shrubs and trees, going through a process known as seral succession until it became woodland. Large grazing animals would have kept it open in the past and nowadays grazing animals and human work are used. Some scrub is important for wildlife so it's a balancing act of keeping the right amount.

Managing Chalk Grassland is important to keep what is left in good condition for wildlife. There have been drastic losses of this habitat through ploughing up to convert to arable fields or by applying fertilizers and seeding other grass species (known as 'improving') to allow higher stocking densities and weight gain of livestock. That has led to a subsequent decline of species dependent on Chalk Grassland. Quarrying arable land/improved pasture and restoring back to Chalk Grassland is a way to bring back this habitat.



## Actions for Nature

**National Nest Box Week** was in February, but it's not too late to think about putting up a nest box. As with finding a great home, providing one for a bird is all about location, location, location. Location – in a place safe from predators such as cats; location – out of direct sunlight so having the entrance hole facing North through to East is best; location – safe from disturbance from people and other birds, so best not to put near bird feeders.

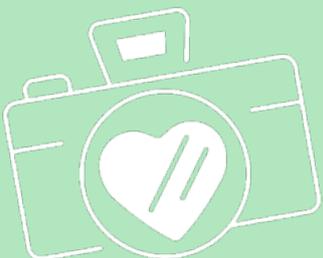
For more information see <https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-you-can-do/activities/all-about-nest-boxes>

One species that is increasingly reliant on nest boxes is the Swift. Many communities have come together to help Swifts by putting up nest boxes on their streets.

See : <https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-you-can-do/activities/create-a-high-home-for-swifts>

## Contact Carl

If you would like advice or a visit from Carl Cornish, our RSPB Senior Business Conservation Adviser for the Cemex Partnership, please get in touch: [carl.cornish@rspb.org.uk](mailto:carl.cornish@rspb.org.uk)



## Send us your stories and photos

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Send them in to: [gb-communicationsandpublicaffairs@cemex.com](mailto:gb-communicationsandpublicaffairs@cemex.com)