



Cemex & RSPB Partnership Blog July 2026



Welcome to the July 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

In June, I joined Sean Cassidy (EMEA Biodiversity Manager) on site visits with Lucile Panet, an intern from Cemex France. Together we visited Swinderby, Willington and Dove Holes quarries to see the historically and more recently restored areas, and operational areas to see how they contribute to biodiversity and Cemex's Nature Positive work programme.

The visits focused on wetland habitats at Swinderby and Willington, and upland calcareous grassland at Dove Holes. We recorded an impressive range of wildlife, including lots of dragonflies (Emperor, Brown and Southern Hawker, and Black-tailed Skimmer) and damselflies (Azure, Banded Demoiselle, Blue-tailed and Emerald), and butterflies (Common Blue, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Painted Lady, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Copper and Small Tortoiseshell). A particular highlight was spotting a female and juvenile Marsh Harrier at Willington Quarry.

This wetland bird of prey is expanding into the Midlands, thanks to restored mineral sites creating valuable reedbeds and wetland habitats.

Earlier in the month, Sean and I attended the Mineral Products Association (MPA) Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Group meeting at Tarmac's Langford Lowfields Quarry. Derbyshire Wildlife Trust presented its new vision for the River Trent, building on earlier work developed by Nature After Minerals, the RSPB and the MPA. The vision recognises mineral site restoration, such as at Willington Quarry, as an important driver for habitat creation and the return of species including Marsh Harrier.

A visit to the neighbouring RSPB reserve at Langford Lowfields, showcased the successful restoration of former sand and gravel workings to thriving reedbeds, highlighting the important role mineral restoration plays in creating habitats and supporting species recovery.



Fen vegetation at a restored lake, Willington Gravel Pits. The pale pink flowers are Flowering Rush and Purple Loosestrife has the dark violet flowers. Photo by Carl Cornish.

Actions for Nature



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Focus on Lakes

There has been a significant historic loss of wetlands across lowland Britain due to a combination of land drainage, river canalisation and changes in land use. Creating more space for water is now essential to support the recovery of wetland species. Lakes are becoming increasingly important for wildlife, providing reliable access to water as warmer climates and more frequent heatwaves put greater pressure on natural habitats.

Creating new wetlands from scratch is costly, but mineral extraction followed by restoration provides an ideal opportunity to shape the land and create lakes, pools and associated wetland habitats. A key consideration in lake design is the gradient of the banks and shoreline. The shallower the banks, the greater the area exposed when water levels fall. This exposed area, known as the ecological drawdown zone, is vital for biodiversity. Shallow margins support a wider variety of waterside plants, provide easier access for amphibians, and create mudflats that benefit specialist plants, insects and feeding birds.

A varied shoreline, with features such as inlets and spits, creates a greater diversity of habitats, while varied underwater topography provides fish with valuable areas for feeding and shelter.

Areas of taller marginal vegetation, including reedbeds and fens (as shown in the photo above of Willington), provide rich habitats for insects, birds and mammals. Including islands within lakes creates safe nesting sites for birds, protected from terrestrial predators. Shingle or sparsely vegetated islands are ideal for nesting terns, gulls and waders, while islands with scrub and trees can attract breeding colonies of herons and egrets.

Waterbody at Swinderby quarry with marginal vegetation of Common Reed. A family party of Coot and a Little Grebe were seen on this pond. Photo by Carl Cornish.



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



Send us your stories and photos

We are looking for staff stories to include in upcoming blogs, these can be experiences from work or home. We would love to share them in an upcoming blog.

Send them in to: gb-communicationsandpublicaffairs@cemex.com